

CIVIL RELIGION AND SHARED VALUES IN SINGAPORE

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my own work and constitutes the results of my own research.

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ABSTRACT

The thesis looks at Singapore and asks, in that nation's continuing process of nation-building which includes attempts to hold on to consistent economic growth, whether through the proposal to formulate a national ideology with a delineation of "shared values", a civil religion was also in the process of being constructed.

There is a short summary of Singapore's history, with emphasis given to how the nation has developed and grown because of its awareness as a economic centre or "commercial emporium" in its geographical locality. Account is also given of the role of the ruling party, and government - the Peoples' Action Party - in terms of its policies in guiding the young nation to economic success.

An examination of the ideology of the ruling party is then undertaken. This leads on to an account of the Singapore government's efforts to implement a National Ideology through a list of Shared Values and the reasons why this is thought necessary for the sake of the nation.

The category or concept of civil religion is then introduced, with specific examples from the American situation. There is further discussion of the Shared Values to show clearly the ideological impulses and Confucianist influences behind them, and after due reference to what "Asian values" might mean, and how Confucian values may have influence on the economic success of East Asian countries, it is reaffirmed that the Singapore government was promoting what can be called a civil religion in the form of the National Ideology (which incorporated such Confucian values) to enhance and continue the economic growth that makes up so much of the perceived destiny of the nation.

The concluding sections deal with the role (or lack of it) of Christians and the Church in the ongoing political, economic and social life of the nation. Does it matter if a Singaporean civil religion or a National Ideology may be in conflict with a Christian ideology? Does the Singapore Church care?

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INTRODUCTION

In 1991 the Government of Singapore institutionalized a formal code of conduct which was to be the National Ideology, but later called the Shared Values. This set of five values had been spelt out in a White Paper, discussed, and subsequently adopted in Parliament.

A political exercise like this raises questions as well as eyebrows of course. Can belief systems and human moral values be simply proposed, debated in Parliament and then, after the customary acceptance, just be written into legislation? How and why were these values chosen? Would the end result be something that a Singaporean would be proud to be identified with, and accept, regardless of any religious beliefs or considerations he or she might have? Would adherence to these values produce the ideal Singaporean and a model citizen? "Ideal" and "model" in whose eyes? What will happen to Singaporeans who do not subscribe to, or accept some or all of these values?

The raising of questions such as these brings up the suspicion that there might be more than the dubious or contentious notion that the introduction of these values will make Singapore a better, more moral, more Asian place to live in. And indeed, it will be proposed that the Shared Values is indeed an ideology. Formulated by the Government, it of course reflects its interests. But we will see that

the ideology also reflects and functionally supports the economic system of Singapore - economic post-Confucianism.

We will suggest also that this Shared Values/National Ideology enterprise is a form of a civil religion or a possible civil religion in the making. Incorporating the Shared Values, this civil religion could on one level be understood as the expression of the cohesion or the integration of the nation. On the other hand, it promotes nationalism. The civil religion is seen as important to the task of nation-building, and may also be interpreted as the response of a continually and anxiously modernizing Government to the specific problems of nation-building.

Singapore's history illuminates these problems. It has survived basically because it has served the economic needs of all who have called upon it. A multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society of mainly immigrants now make up the nation. Different religious traditions and cultural practices always carry the potential for civil conflict, and thus a civil religion is formed not just to control and disarm the different religions, but also to channel fundamental allegiance to the nation. National loyalties and a transcendent meaning to the nation is thus promoted, made possible by the privatized nature of the religions. Such devotion to the nation and the sense that the nation is special and should be sacred to the citizen is legitimised by the constant hectoring that the nation's survival depends on its people giving their all to the

nation. The Shared Values and the civil religion is a creed to enable them to do so, and such commitment to the civil religion will be rewarded, it is promised, by more economic success - further proof of the survival of the nation - and more of the Good Life.

Civil religion has different, complex, multifaceted forms. It is a slippery concept, and is hard to define completely. Is the Singapore version a new form or is it unique to the local situation? Its roots appear to lie in Confucian values derived from local culture and which seem ideal for a civil religion that would ultimately justify its presence by economic growth in the name of the nation.

What of the Church's response, which surely should be in the name of the Father? Has it identified the presence of the civil religion, and realised that its sacralizing of nationalism may be idolatry? Will it be able to hold its ground, or even justify its existence against a civil religion that in time to come, may claim the allegiance and devotion of all who would enjoy the fruits of the economy; the Good Life of affluence and consumerism? In not wanting to rock the boat, has it already been seduced into being merely a part of the legitimising ideological structure of the State? What indeed is the role of the Church in the face of a Government quietly but firmly promoting a civil religion?

We shall explore some answers in this thesis.

CHAPTER I

A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF SINGAPORE

When the "Miss Universe" contest was hosted by Singapore in 1987, the tagline used to promote the country on satellite television all over the world was "Surprising Singapore". An apt description indeed, when one, after knowing of its economic success, then learns it is only a small island 42 kilometres in length, 23 kilometres in breadth, and 580.6 square kilometres in area. Its international renown appears disproportionate to its size! Another aspect that may be surprising about Singapore is that as a nation-state it is relatively new. Singapore became in any sense important only after 1819 when it was established by the British East India Company. Also, political independence was not obtained until 1965 - a late starter (although development socially, politically and economically was already going on) compared to other nations in South-East Asia. The major span of Singapore's modern history thus occurred between 1819 and 1965. This chapter will provide a basic sketch of that history, as well as post-1965 developments.

A. 1819 - 1959.

Singapore lies approximately 136.8 kilometres north of the Equator, and has as its immediate neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia. The resident population at June 30, 1991 was calculated to be 2,762,700, consisting 77.7 % Chinese

residents, 14.1 % Malays, 7.1 % Indians, with other ethnic groups making up 1.1 %. This much can be ascertained in 1993. However, we cannot be so certain about the Singapore past before 1819. There can be no precise date for the beginnings of Temasek (or Tumasik) - the old name for Singapore. The Javanese Nagarakretagama of 1365 does mention a Temasek or Sea Town. There is also a third-century Chinese account which describes Singapore as Pu-luo-chung or "island at the end of a peninsula". Be that as it may, by the end of the 14th century, Temasek was in the middle of a conflict between the Javanese Majapahit Empire and Siam (Thailand) for the control of the Malacca Strait and the Malayan Peninsula. Temasek gave allegiance to Siam until the governor (sent by the Siamese) was murdered by Parameswara, a prince of Palembang who had been given asylum there from Majapahit. Parameswara then installed himself as Temasek's new ruler.¹ He was soon driven out however, north to the Malayan peninsula. Around 1400 Temasek became a Siamese vassal state. This led to the end of the island's commercial activity and became instead a centre for piracy, until it sank into subsequent obscurity, only re-appearing in the light of history with the arrival of Stamford Raffles.

By the end of the 18th century Britain, which had

¹Legend attributes the name "Singapura", "city of the lion", to Parameswara or one of his ancestors who, landing at Temasek, saw a strange animal resembling a lion. It is possible too that Parameswara named his settlement thus to signify he was reestablishing there his Palembang lion-throne.

developed trade with China, was in urgent need of a sheltered port - a half-way house - on the long sea route between India and China, to refit, resupply, and protect its fleet against the Dutch navy and local pirates. As a result Penang was established as a trading post in 1786, but it was soon found that Penang was too far from the Malacca Strait to be truly advantageous to the East India Company. The Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen (off west Sumatra), Thomas Stamford Raffles was then instructed to find a new trading post at the most central point possible in the region of the Straits. On 28 January 1819 Raffles disembarked at Singapore. He had determined that it was at the southern approach to the Malacca Strait, that it had suitable harbours, and that there were no Dutch already in Singapore!²

"Modern Singapore dates from 30 January 1819, when the local chieftan, the Temenggong of Johore, signed a preliminary treaty with...Raffles, agent of the East India Company, permitting the British to set up a trading post".³ A formal treaty was then signed on 6 February 1819 with the Sultan of Johore and the Temenggong. "From the beginning Raffles regarded Singapore as a commercial centre. He had written in June 1819, 'Our object is not territory but

²R.S. Milne and Diane K. Mauzy, Singapore, The Legacy of Lee Kuan Yew, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), p.42.

³C.M. Turnbull, A History of Singapore, 1819-1988, second edition, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.1.

trade; a great commercial emporium...' "4 And indeed, Singapore proved to be a prized catch. By 1820 it was earning revenue, and Raffles wrote to his cousin in July that year: "My settlement continues to thrive most wonderfully; it is all and everything I could wish and if no untimely fate awaits it, promises to become the emporium and the pride of the East".⁵

1824 was a decisive year - Raffles' "settlement" was acknowledged as a permanent British possession as a result of two treaties. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty, signed in March 1824 had the Dutch ceasing all further objections to the British being in Singapore; and a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (August 1824) in which Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong ceded the island and all islets within ten miles of its shores to the British.⁶

Singapore grew rapidly from then on. "In 1825-40, the sheltered deep-water harbour established itself as a rendez-vous for large European merchant vessels and the boats of Chinese and other local owners, the former with goods from India (textiles, arms, opium) for redistribution in the region, and the latter with spices, silks, tropical woods, tea and tin".⁷ Although European merchants

⁴Ibid., p.20.

⁵Ibid., p.12.

⁶Milne and Mauzy, op.cit., p,.43.

⁷Philippe Regnier, Singapore, City-State in South-East Asia, (London: Hurst & Company, 1987), p.17.

controlled British and Indian trade, Singapore was also an important centre for Asian-dominated Indonesian, Siamese, Chinese, and Malaysian trade. The majority of immigrants were indeed attracted to Singapore precisely because it was a trading centre. Although in January 1819 Singapore had about 1,000 inhabitants, the first official census in 1842 showed that the population had increased to nearly 11,000. By 1860, the population was over 80,000, of whom about 50,000 were Chinese, 13,000 were Indians, and 11,000 were Malays. Europeans present remained a small minority, made up mainly of senior administrators and merchants.⁸

The next development was in 1826, when the East India Company united Singapore with Penang and Malacca to form the Straits Settlements. Penang was made the capital then, but by 1832, Singapore became the centre of government of the Settlements. On April 1, 1867, the Straits Settlements were converted into a Crown Colony, under the Colonial Office in London. Three factors arose next which combined steadily to accelerate and consolidate her growth in the last quarter of the 19th century: the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the extension of British protection (and involvement) to the Malay States, which began in 1874 and was known as the British "forward movement", and the steady conversion of cargo shipping to steam from the mid-1860s.

Singapore ceased to be an isolated settlement, divorced from the hinterland, looking out to sea, living on her nerves and her wits in the

⁸Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.43.

uncertainties of international trade. She acquired permanent status as a major entrepot on the leading East-West Straits of Malacca trade route, the focus for the trading wealth of the Malay peninsula and the Dutch East Indies, and one of the most vital commercial key points of the British Empire.⁹

With the development of rubber planting in Malaya, especially after the 1870s, Singapore also became the world's main sorting and exporting centre of the commodity. With trade expanding eightfold between 1873 and 1913, Singapore enjoyed unprecedented prosperity.

Singapore became strategically significant again after World War I when Japanese armed power became obvious to the West. The Washington Naval treaties of 1922, as part of a major power agreement to restrict the building of battleships, had Britain agreeing not to construct a naval base anywhere east of 110 degrees longitude. This left out Hong Kong, and made Singapore the logical site. "Construction of the Fortress Singapore naval base, with its big guns designed to fire armor-piercing shells against battleships as the key to its sea defense, began shortly thereafter and was completed just before the beginning of World War II".¹⁰

In the meantime, what of colonial rule in the late 1930's? The limited objectives of such rule were satisfied. The wealthy and well-educated had a say in the running of government which was usually heeded, although ultimate

⁹Turnbull, op.cit., p.76.

¹⁰Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.45.

control or power was not theirs'. The rest of the population was indifferent but not hostile to the ruling powers. Singapore was still just a collection of immigrant communities, with their varying cultures, interests and loyalties rooted to their foreign native countries, and having the ultimate ambition often to return "home", whether it was Britain, India or China. The Singapore residents were content to leave government in the hands of the colonial authorities, and by and large, a reasonable level of efficient administration was achieved. It was therefore a time of peace, increasing comfort and leisure for the well-off upper and middle levels of Singapore society. In what can be termed a "supply-side/trickle down effect", some of the benefits from improved public works and amenities did permeate through to the mass of the population. However, as a young American was quoted as saying in 1937, "The Government of the Colony is run by a small group of insiders living a life the comforts and luxuries of which are rarely inspired by too close contact with the sordid poverty which has set its stamp on the great bulk of the population" and "it is still no exaggeration to say that it is a government run by and for those who have won through to power and wealth, and devil take the hindmost". British colonial rule had apparently lost the zest and vitality which had been present in the early part of the century. Instead, it had become jaded, smug, complacent, yet seemed as firmly rooted in Singapore

as ever. "Imperialism appears always to be committed to perpetuating its own rule unless it is challenged by a force which makes it necessary or expedient for it to withdraw".¹¹

The challenge arrived, and peace and prosperity (and for some, the easy life) came to an end when Japanese aircraft bombed Singapore in the early morning of December 8, 1941. The Japanese had also landed troops near the Thai-Malayan border and were marching and bicycling down the peninsula towards Singapore. Morale was hardly boosted when two of the mightiest capital ships of the British Royal Navy, the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, were sunk by the Japanese air force off Kuantan on the east coast of the peninsula. Britain clearly did not consider the possibility of a Japanese invasion by land from the Malayan peninsula, which was only separated by a narrow stretch of water from the island's practically undefended northern shore. And thus, the siege of "impregnable" Fortress Singapore lasted just two weeks. With the "big guns" useless against a land army and pointing the wrong way, food and water dwindling fast, with no fleet or aerial defence to defend itself, civilians and troops alike in panic and disarray, on February 15, 1942 General Arthur Percival surrendered the pearl of the British empire in South-East Asia to the Japanese, without too much of a fight. Winston Churchill called it "one of the greatest disasters in British

¹¹Turnbull, op.cit., p.155.

history". It was obviously disastrous too for the civilian population of Singapore - renamed "Syonan" (light of the south) - during the three-and-a-half year occupation by the Japanese forces. Unprecedented hardship was the common lot, with the Chinese singled out for atrocities because of old historical hatreds.

One lesson (or reminder of Singapore's strategic geographical position) came from the fact that between 1942 and 1945 the Japanese placed Singapore at the centre of their "Co-prosperity Sphere" in South-East Asia. They obviously knew how to benefit from Singapore's unique geographical features, and "Syonan" was also made the base for their administrative and military command in Malaya and throughout the region. "The visit of Prime Minister Tojo in 1943 confirmed Singapore as the cornerstone in the construction of 'Grand East Asia' and as the communication centre for the New Order".¹²

The "New Order" came to an end when the British forces returned in September 1945, and until March 1946, Singapore came under the British Military Administration. When Singapore fell in 1942, The Times in London carried the headline "More than the evacuation of a town, it was the end of an era". And indeed it was. After the suffering of the last three-and-a-half years, the British were welcomed back as liberators. However, colonized South-East Asia was not the same as before the war - the myth of "white

¹²Regnier, op.cit., p.22.

supremacy" had been forever shattered.

But it was a different Singapore and a changed South-East Asia to which the Commonwealth troops returned in 1945...the statue of Raffles, which the British restored to Empress Place, had somehow faded in colour. 'The halo of victory must shine on the Union Jack, but today there remains little vestige of its glory of former times.' The regime was welcomed back with genuine relief because it was benign, its weaknesses were sins of omission, its memory was not marred by cruelty or dragooning the population. But the only ultimate justification for a colonial power was its ability to protect and in this the British colonial regime had been tried and found wanting. The old unquestioning trust in British protection had been shattered for ever...For the moment, the return of the British meant the end of a nightmare. Another ten years were to pass before the emergence of leaders of a new generation, who had experienced the shock of the surrender and occupation and the exhilaration of the post-war winds of change, and who were to challenge the British right to rule.¹³

B. Political Awakening: Towards Self-Government (1946-1959)

British civilian rule was reestablished in April 1946, and with it, the Straits Settlements was disbanded. Malacca and Penang were joined with the other Malay States to form the Malayan Union, while Singapore was made a separate Crown colony. The colonial authorities then aimed to work gradually towards internal self-government and to build up feelings of common loyalty towards Singapore as a permanent home. By this time, Singapore's inhabitants - still cosmopolitan and mixed - comprised approximately 78% Chinese, 12 % Malays and Indonesians, 7% Indians, and 3 % Europeans, Eurasians and others. The people, especially the

¹³Turnbull, op.cit., p.214.

merchant class, were by now clamouring for a say in the government. The 1947 census also revealed a surprisingly large proportion of local-born Singaporeans, and this strengthened calls for developing political responsibility and self-government. Plans were then made to transfer power to Singaporeans gradually by developing the existing executive and legislative bodies into separate Councils (accomplished in July 1947), and by widening representation. The British were also becoming concerned over the growing influence of the Communists inside Singapore's trade unions and Chinese middle schools. The political division emerging in Singapore then was between the English educated of all races and the Chinese-educated Chinese. "The former were stereotyped as privileged, politically apathetic, exam oriented, competitive, individualistic, and not culturally 'solid'. The latter were identified as cultural chauvinists and either Communist or pro-Communist".¹⁴ Thus the policy of the British was to ensure the gradual transfer of some power specifically to the non-Communist English-educated Straits-born subjects of Singapore, since there were internal security problems posed by the Communists, and the fear that they would use postwar nationalist sentiments for their own ends, unless some progress was seen to be made in the direction of political liberalization. These "political divisions" could be seen when Singapore's first election -

¹⁴Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.46.

with limited franchise - was held on March 20, 1948. This was for six elected seats in the Legislative Council, but only a fraction of the populace was eligible to vote, and of these, only a fraction actually bothered to register and vote. The Progressive Party enjoyed significant support and won three seats - the elected members were all English-speaking lawyers and political moderates. The Party itself continued to win seats on the Municipal Commission in 1949 and in the 1951 Legislative Council elections, but it was very pro-British and "was badly out of touch with the masses".¹⁵

At the end of 1953, the British government appointed a commission under Sir George Rendel to review Singapore's constitutional position and to make recommendations for change. Its report came out in 1954, and the "Rendel Constitution" thus came into force in 1955, providing for the automatic registration of voters and a legislative assembly with an elected majority. The leader of the majority party would also become the chief minister and would select a cabinet. Some degree of self-rule would be given, but Britain would still have control over some important subjects or areas. The British governor would not even be required to accept any advice given by the elected chief minister! The Rendel proposals were duly accepted by the Government, and elections were called for April 1955 which motivated the formation of several new political

¹⁵Ibid., p. 47. .

parties. The Labour Front was formed in late 1954 by David Marshall and Lim Yew Hock under the banner of being a liberal but moderate left-wing party. Recognising that the future belonged to politicians who could command the loyalty of the Chinese-educated, another party, the People's Action Party (PAP) was inaugurated in October 1954 in the Victoria Memorial Hall at a gathering of more than 1500 people. Lee Kuan Yew was made the leader of a committee comprising trade unionists and Chinese- and English-educated radicals. The presence at the inauguration of Tunku Abdul Rahman, head of the United Malay National Organisation from Malaya, and Sir Tan Cheng Lock, leader of the Malayan Chinese Association, underlined the PAP's intention to move away from narrow, parochial Singapore affairs to a wider Malayan horizon. "The party pledged itself to agitate in the coming elections for immediate independence in union with the Federation, for the repeal of the emergency regulations,¹⁶ a common Malayan citizenship, complete Malayanization of the civil service, free compulsory education, the encouragement of local industry, the amendment of trade union legislation and for a workers' charter".¹⁷ The PAP had support from pro-Communist trade unionists and Chinese students who could garner support from the Chinese-educated Chinese and the

¹⁶When the Communist Party of Malaya tried to take over Malaya and Singapore by force, a state of emergency was declared in June 1948, which lasted 12 years.

¹⁷Turnbull, op.cit., p.248.

lower-economic classes. Its clenched fist salutes and singing of international Communist songs helped also in giving the PAP a radical, socialist, anticolonial image. Another party, the Democratic Party, was formed in February 1955, as a conservative and communal party with the aim of defending and enhancing Chinese culture. The Progressive Party (PP) also intended to contest the election, as did the Alliance, a coalition of separate ethnic groups, like its parent body in Malaya.

The 1955 election was the first lively political contest in Singapore's history. Automatic registration had increased the number of voters from 75,000 to over 300,000 and, for the first time, it included large numbers of Chinese-educated voters who had previously been politically indifferent. The election thus marked a vigorous, vociferous political awakening in various ways. It began years of energetic and persistent constitutional struggle when new nationalist leaders emerged and issues truly affecting the majority of the Singapore people were brought into the political arena. "The 1955 election was the funeral of conservative politics...the future belonged to politicians of the left who aimed to seize self-government as quickly as possible and to build up mass support against colonial rule".¹⁸ The Labour Front won ten out of twenty five seats, and with the support of three seats from the Alliance, and two nominated members, it formed the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 252.

government with David Marshall as chief minister. The PP and the Democrats did badly. The PAP won three seats, with strong support from pro-government organizations.

Marshall's term as chief minister, lasting fourteen months, were marked by riots and strikes, not helped by his apparent unwillingness to take any sort of firm action. However, he did bring about talks on constitutional reform in which he demanded complete self-rule for Singapore. The first All-Party Constitutional Mission to London took place April-May 1956, and although the British finally agreed to almost everything the delegates had wanted, with the exception of control over emergency internal security powers, the talks broke down when Marshall (against the urging of Lee Kuan Yew and other delegates present) refused to accept the package offered. In June 1956 Marshall resigned.

Lim Yew Hock, the former deputy leader of the Labour Front, became the new chief minister. Faced immediately with the same sort of problems Marshall had in Singapore, Lim acted differently by hitting back at the unions and Chinese students. There was an extensive anti-Communist security crackdown involving widespread use of powers such as detention, banishment, deregistration of organizations and societies, closure of two Chinese middle schools, and even calling in the British army when he deemed it necessary. These actions led to him being perceived by the people as a tool of British imperialism and a colonial

stooge, and he made it worse for himself by using as much force against the students as against unruly unionists - and thus perceived as attacking Chinese culture.¹⁹ The PAP was greatly helped by a wave of arrests ordered by the Lim government on August 22, 1957. The sweep netted thirty five pro-Communists, five of whom were on the PAP Executive Committee. These arrests were significant for the PAP because at its party conference elections on August 4, the pro-Communists had planned to seize control of the party from the moderates through "fixed" elections. The moderates grasped the opportunity the arrests gave them to regain control of the party and to alter the PAP constitution to prevent any further "coups".

Lim was also politically committed to seeking constitutional reform, and the March 1957 constitutional mission to London led by him succeeded in obtaining the main terms of a new Singapore Constitution. On May 28, 1958 the Constitutional Agreement was signed in London. And so it was that in August 1958, the British Parliament passed a State of Singapore Act, which converted the colony into a state with control over all domestic affairs. Internal security would be handled by the Internal Security Council, comprising representatives from Singapore, the Federation of Malaya and Britain. There would be an elected 51-member Legislative Assembly. The Prime Minister would select his cabinet, and after a short while, a local Chief of State

¹⁹ Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.49.

(Yang Di-Pertuan Negara) would be chosen. The British government would retain control of defence and foreign affairs, and could only suspend the constitution and assume full powers of government through its Commissioner in the event of a grave emergency. "The only controversial point was the British insistence that known subversives should be excluded from the first elections, which were scheduled to be held in May 1959 to bring the new constitution into force".²⁰

Coming into the election, the Lim Yew Hock government had big problems - the economy was a mess with declining trade; unemployment was rising; there were severe shortages in housing, schools, and health clinics; and even the local birthrate was getting too high. The PAP, on the other hand, looked a winner. Besides affirming its continuing commitment to complete independence through merger with Malaya, the focus of the campaign was on bread-and-butter issues - the kind that was hurting the Lim government - with merger as the ultimate cure for Singapore's economic problems. As Turnbull so succinctly puts it,

Claiming to be 'a party founded on principle, not opportunism', PAP leaders promised 'honest and efficient government', which would tackle the problems of education, labour, trade unions, social security, housing, rural development, health and the status of women. They pledged to work towards uniting Singapore with the Federation. Their primary aim was to 'infuse into our multiracial society the spirit of belonging to a nation', and the next priority was to transform Singapore from a trading to an

²⁰Turnbull, op.cit., p.261.

industrial society, 'to obtain for the general masses of the people a happy, full and secure livelihood'.²¹

It must be said that the state of affairs in Singapore in 1959, including its "success", was largely due to the PAP keeping its pledges in its own inimitable way after it swept into power in the May 1959 election. The Party contested all 51 seats and won 43, obtaining 53.4 % of the total votes. 4 seats went to the Singapore People's Alliance (Lim Yew Hock's new party), 3 to UMNO-MCA Alliance, and the remaining seat to an Independent.

With this then, and for the first time, Singapore had a fully elected government and one with a strong working majority. On the evening of June 3, 1959, with huge celebrations going on, Singapore was proclaimed a state by the Governor, Sir William Goode, who also became the first Yang Di-Pertuan Negara. The first Government of the State of Singapore was sworn in on June 5, with Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister.

C. 1959 - Present: Towards Stability, Progress, and Prosperity.

The PAP had achieved power in a united front with the Communists to fight British colonialism. As has been mentioned earlier, the Communists were also in control of many mass organisations, especially of worker unions and students. It was thus an uneasy alliance between the PAP

²¹Ibid., p.263.

leaders who were moderates, and the pro-Communists - another example of politics bringing together "strange bed-fellows", but also one in which each side was seeking to use the other for its own particular objective. The PAP moderates wanted full independence for Singapore as part of a non-Communist Malaya; the Communists wanted a take-over. Lee Kuan Yew had no illusions over this: he was quoted during the 1959 election campaign as saying that the "real fight" between the PAP and the Malayan Communist Party (many of whose members were in the PAP) would begin after the election.²²

Still, the new government soon got to work. It knew it had to "deliver the goods"; that it would survive, or continue in power, only if it performed effectively. A Central Executive Committee Policy Statement, dated December 31, 1960, had these words: "At the end of our term of office, the people will judge us not on the basis of our capacity for slogan-shouting...but on whether we have been able to protect the livelihood of the people...and to expand the social, health, housing, educational and cultural services for the people".²³

In short, the PAP government had to gain the confidence and allegiance of the people in spite of (and because of) the ever-present Communist influence at the

²²Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.52.

²³Raj K. Vasil, Governing Singapore, rev.ed. (Singapore: Times Books International, 1988), p.10.

grass-roots. In fact, the government machinery started establishing its own grass-roots organisations, such as the People's Association, Citizens' Consultative Committees, and community centres to build support for its own policies and to counter the pro-Communist influence. The government also stopped using the party or legislature to discuss policies. It might thus be said that out of the internal PAP struggle between the "moderates" and the "radicals/pro-Communists", the style or pattern in the PAP of "no discussion and little consultation", and of ignoring the party membership and ordinary membership between elections developed, into a working style for the PAP for years to come.²⁴

Another side to this governing style , a combination of style and substance, one might say, was seen in the way the leaders dressed: white short-sleeved cotton shirts as befitting busy, hard-working, dedicated government servants intent on turning ideas into action for the sake of the nation.²⁵ And for the sake of the nation, the trade unions were targeted for reform (and as such, also undermining Communist influence). Industrialization was seen as one important answer to such economic woes as Singapore's high unemployment. Singapore thus needed industrialization, and to achieve that it needed industrial peace. The Trade

²⁴Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., pp.55-56.

²⁵T.J.S.George, Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), p.52.

Unions (Amendment) Act of 1959 was passed to curb splinter unions, for example. It was not till 1967 and 1968 that legislation stripped unions of most of their powers, and by then the National Trades Union Congress had been set up as the official "umbrella" organisation for unions, as well as being an open partner of the government.

The tension between the PAP and the pro-Communists finally led to an open split in 1961. In May Tunku Abdul Rahman, prime minister of Malaya, had suggested in a luncheon speech in Singapore, that perhaps Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo, and the British protectorate Brunei might be united as "Malaysia". The Tunku meant it as a tentative suggestion; Lee and his associates acted as if the Tunku's speech was an official invitation! This was understandable since merger with Malaya (and thus a common market) was seen as another answer to Singapore's economic problems. Merger was also a solid issue to use in the inevitable confrontation with the "radicals" in the PAP. A vote of confidence on merger was therefore called in the Assembly on July 21, 1961 and the PAP barely made it with 27 votes out of 51. 13 PAP assemblymen had deserted it for the opposition. The Communists were totally against merger - Malaya's stringent internal security laws were obviously anathema to them - and they were prepared to do battle with the PAP moderates (and perhaps show the government could not survive without Communist backing) over this issue.

And so the split occurred. On July 26, the 13 assemblymen and 22 branch officials were expelled from the PAP. They announced in turn that they were forming a new political party, the Barisan Sosialis. Very quickly, 35 of 51 branch committees, 19 of the 23 paid organising secretaries, and about 70% of the PAP ordinary members went over to the Barisan. As Goh Keng Swee, then Minister of Finance, commented: "What shook us was not that we had lost the fight to the communists, but that it was done with such contemptuous ease: just one flick of the hand, and we were down on the floor".²⁶

The PAP nevertheless began hard selling of "merger" to the people through radio talks, debates, speeches in constituencies, and in newspapers. A White Paper stating the PAP's stand on the conditions for merger was released in November 1961, and a referendum on merger was scheduled for September 1, 1962. The referendum itself did not offer voters the choice of no merger - just 3 different sets of terms of merger. The result: 71% of the votes went to the PAP's own favoured terms of central government responsibility for defence, foreign affairs and internal security, and local autonomy in education and labour.

Under the Malaysia Agreement, finally concluded in

²⁶Dennis Bloodworth, The Tiger and the Trojan Horse, (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), pp.243-244. This book, as well as John Drysdale, Singapore: Struggle for Success, (Singapore: Times Books International, 1984) are authoritative, well-written accounts of the tumultuous 1950s and '60s in Singapore.

July 1963, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo (now Sabah) were federated with the existing states of Malaya to form Malaysia. While Singapore kept powers over her finance, labour and education affairs, she relinquished control over foreign affairs, defence and internal security to the central government. 15 seats were allotted in the 127-member federal legislature to Singapore, who retained her own executive government and Assembly as well as her own Yang Di-Pertuan Negara and Public Service Commission. She was responsible for her own executive administration and day-to-day policies. In terms of division of revenues, she was obliged to pay to the central government 40 % of her income from taxes, which came to 27 % of her total revenue. "Lee Kuan Yew declared Singapore's freedom unilaterally on 31 August 1963, the date originally set for the coming into being of the new federation, so that the island enjoyed an anomalous fifteen days of full independence before becoming part of Malaysia".²⁷ Malaysia was officially formed on September 16, 1963. While the Phillipines and Indonesia were both against the merger, it was President Sukarno of Indonesia who actively opposed it during 3 years of "Confrontation".

During this transitional period, the PAP was also gearing up for another battle with the Barisan, through a snap election called for September 23, 1963. In February 1963, police in what was called Operation Cold Store

²⁷Turnbull, op.cit., p.274.

arrested 107 pro-Communists alleged to be subversives. Those detained included 24 Barisan members (in fact, most of its executive committee) and 21 union leaders. Seven Barisan assemblymen were later arrested when a demonstration they were in turned violent. The PAP also froze the funds of 3 of the largest unions affiliated to the Barisan and dissolved 5 mass organisations.

The PAP won the September 1963 election with 37 out of 51 seats. The Barisan obtained 13 seats. The PAP had shown its effectiveness as a government by then in tackling unemployment and in building more low-cost housing, schools and hospitals, and a crucial winning factor was its success in achieving merger and ending colonial rule.

The merger proved to be short-lived, traumatic and unhappy. After 23 months Singapore was expelled from the federation on August 9, 1965. The events during this period leading to the separation have been extensively analysed²⁸ (with, doubtless, doctoral dissertations written on them), so I shall only focus on some highlights.

There were already incompatibilities and divisions existing from the sheer fact of Singapore being an urban, commercial and industrial society, and that of Malaya being a rural, racially divided society still largely traditional in its outlook. The lack of understanding already present was emphasised in the differences between the styles and

²⁸See for example, Tae Y. Nam, Racism, Nationalism, and Nation-Building in Malaysia and Singapore (Meerut, India: Sadhna Prakashan, 1973).

personalities of the Malayan Alliance ruling coalition government and those of the PAP leaders. One economic goal which was important to Singapore - that of a common market - failed to materialise, apparently because the Malaysian finance minister who was also president of the Malaysian Chinese Association, Tun Tan Siew Sin, objected to any possible increase of Singapore's economic advantages at the expense of local MCA businessmen.

Politically, the "ultra-conservatives" of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) - the dominant party in the Alliance - distrusted the PAP's support of multiracialism and of it being "socialist"; understandable, when recognising the inherent conservatism and communalism found in federal Malaysian politics. The PAP on its part seemed oblivious to any ethnic and political sensitivity necessary, and charged into federal politics without appearing to recognise the delicate fabric of the new federation, and the always-present tension (perhaps even irreconcilable division) between Malay and Chinese. This came out in earnest when the PAP stated its intention of fielding candidates in the federal elections of 1964 throughout the peninsula against Tunku Abdul Rahman's Alliance party. This only angered the Tunku and increased ethnic tensions in the process. On July 12, 1964, an UMNO "ultra", Syed Jaafar Albar organised a Muslim convention in Singapore which sought to protest against the perceived "victimization" of Malays by the PAP. This of course had

the predicted (and desired?) result of stoking up ethnic emotions and hatreds which soon flashed into race riots 9 days later, after a religious procession of 25,000 Muslims in honour of Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The riots lasted 11 days and left 21 dead and 460 injured. More race riots broke out in September; more were left dead. While these disturbances occurred in Singapore, there was the fear that they would soon spread throughout the whole Malay peninsula, and was thus a distinct factor leading to Singapore's ultimate ejection from Malaysia.

The last straw for the Malaysian politicians may well have been the formation of the Malaysian Solidarity Convention in Singapore on May 9, 1965. This comprised the PAP and four opposition parties from the Malayan states and Sarawak. The Convention's slogan was "a democratic, Malaysian Malaysia", and it called for an end to communal politics, and for political affiliation on the basis of "common political ideologies and common social and economic aspirations". It was distinctly formed as an alternative to the Alliance, and thus to Malays this represented provocation.

While the Malaysian Solidarity Convention claimed to be non-communal, organized on ideological and socio-economic lines, in practice it appealed mainly to non-Malays, particularly to the Chinese, and the equality it sought implied the ultimate withdrawal of Malay privileges. Consequently, instead of reducing communal tensions, the Malaysian Solidarity Convention widened racial rifts.²⁹

²⁹Turnbull, op.cit., p.284.

At the UMNO General Assembly one week after the Convention's formation there were persistent and angry demands for the arrest of Lee Kuan Yew.

And so it was that, while convalescing in London, the Tunku finally decided that Singapore had to be expelled because of the threat of further race riots, and also because of the pressure on him to arrest Lee and administer Singapore under emergency regulations. A sorrowing (and tearful) Lee thus went on radio and television on the evening of 9-10 August 1965 to announce the separation, saying "For me it is a moment of anguish because all my adult life, I have believed in the merger and unity of these two territories". Now he and the PAP had to govern a sovereign and independent nation.

D. Surviving Independence

Singapore cannot be understood or viewed in isolation from its external environment. The story is not fully told of Singapore's struggle for survival after independence if one just narrates facts like these: that Singapore was admitted to the United Nations on September 21, 1965, that it became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations on October 15, 1965, or that on December 22, 1965, it became a republic with Yusof bin Ishak as the first President. The fact remained that for the first time, Singapore was on its own. The Indonesian-Sukarno policy of "confrontation" was still on (it lasted till 1966), and the bad feelings engendered in Malaysia by the separation intensified the

problem of Singapore's survival. The PAP leaders were now "acutely conscious of how precarious were Singapore's traditional commercial functions, and thus of the need to diversify the economy. In the political field, they saw with stark clarity how vulnerable the island was to any hostile move by its neighbours".³⁰ Independence for the people of Singapore was thus sudden, shocking, and sobering.

Economically, the island had no natural resources, not even enough water for its own needs (even today it buys water from Johore), and its domestic market was too small to really support its economy. Recognising all this, Singapore's strategy for survival and development was essentially to take advantage of its location and the favourable world economy.

The leaders quickly got down to work. Sociopolitical, economic, and security priorities obviously had to be determined. The overall goals had to be political stability, economic prosperity, and security - goals still valid and being promoted today as always necessary for the continued success and survival of Singapore. To survive, the nation needed a "rugged society"; the PAP insisted the people of Singapore had to be (and must be willing to be) dedicated, committed, able to accept (and even understand) that the government's goals required allegiance and loyalty, order, discipline, and a community-spirit, all

³⁰Regnier, op.cit., p.24.

willing to work together as a team. "At the leadership level it demanded unified purposefulness; at the administrative level, efficiency; and at the popular level, obedience".³¹ These, according to the PAP, were the traits needed for small nation-states to survive. And since the PAP had adopted multiracialism as a principle for the nation, it then took steps to build up and inculcate what it hoped would be a genuine Singaporean national identity - one that would be multiethnic, but also cohesive, integrated, "tightly knit".

"The PAP government wanted a compliant citizenry so that it could get on with building the new state and nation...because the PAP enjoyed extensive voluntary compliance from the citizenry, the government did not indulge in many liberal sentiments over sectors of society it deemed troublesome."³² The Barisan Sosialis had denounced Singapore's independence as "phoney", and had boycotted Parliament when it convened in December 1965. In the new few months, some Barisan MPs were arrested, others fled the country, while still others quit Parliament with the result that by October 1966, no Barisan MP remained in Parliament. With decreasing popular support, the party found itself increasingly isolated from the public. The PAP government also undermined the Barisan's support bases among the students and the unions. Students applying for

³¹Drysdale, op.cit., p.182.

³²Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.63.

entrance into the university had first to obtain "suitability certificates". Teaching in the university, particularly in the political science, and philosophy departments was carefully checked. When in October and November 1966 students staged protest sit-ins and examination boycotts, many of them were arrested and expelled. The press (then as now) came under close scrutiny and control. Again, in the eyes of the PAP, such measures were necessary for the sake of the nation; full attention could now be given to tackling the economic and social problems that face the country.

Economically, the government launched a massive industrialisation programme with the extension of the Jurong industrial estate and the creation of smaller estates in Kallang Park, Tanjong Rhu, Redhill, Tiong Bahru and Tanglin Halt. But to modernise quickly and successfully, taking advantage of "the favourable world economy", the PAP leaders also realised Singapore needed the capital and technology of multinational corporations (MNCs), which were invited to take part in Singapore's economic growth. Acknowledging Singapore's advantageous geographical location, policies were made not just to promote trade with its neighbours in the region, but ultimately to see the world as Singapore's market place or "hinterland" (as observed in early 1993 with calls by the government for more Singaporeans to take risks by having more business ventures overseas, and to be true

"entrepreneurs"). But to attract MNCs and trade to Singapore's shores, the government also decided that it must be regarded as a "safe" place to invest in, so conditions such as a politically stable environment, an educated and skilled work force, no graft or corruption, necessary support industries and institutions had to be present. Most of all, there had to be industrial peace and established wage policies, as well as "compliant" unions. It did not therefore bother the PAP very much if the policies and legislation it had designed to achieve such conditions were called repressive or undemocratic. And so in August 1966 the government passed far-reaching labour legislation, with the purpose of turning union confrontation into co-operation and thus providing an attractive climate for investment. The new laws sought to increase productivity by permitting longer working hours, reduced holidays, restricted overtime and bonus payments, and limited white-collar workers' fringe benefits. Noncitizens and those with criminal records were banned from being union officeholders. However the laws also gave compensating benefits for the majority of workers, providing for sick leave and retrenchment benefits, and increasing employers' contributions to the Central Provident Fund (CPF).³³ Further legislation in 1967 and

³³The CPF was set up in 1955 to provide financial protection for workers when they were old or were unable to work. Today it has evolved into a comprehensive social security scheme, providing for a member's retirement, home ownership and health care needs.

1968 restricted areas of union activity. Later in 1971 a National Wages Council was formed, comprising government, trade union and employers' representatives to set guidelines on wage policy and pre-empt industrial action.

In the eyes of the PAP leaders, the next few years showed that what they considered to be their resolve, clear thinking, and courage to be tough - along with the willingness of the citizenry to follow - were paying off for Singapore. A new nation-state was indeed being built; Singapore had not only survived but had begun to prosper. "Singapore in the 1970s gives the impression of a people generally satisfied with their government. Lee can appreciate the wisdom of an ancient Chinese sage who advised a king that if he wanted his subjects to remain peaceful, he should keep their stomachs full and their heads empty. The majority of Singaporeans appear happy with the prosperity that has come their way. More and more young people are being turned out with no notion of broad democratic values and apparently quite content with the good life they are enjoying".³⁴ One would not be exaggerating if it is stated that the economic history of Singapore from, say 1968, could be summarised in an impressive series of statistics and achievements. But that would make the rest of this chapter rather pedantic. It would be sufficient to note that the government has always sought fresh responses and new ways to meet perceived new

³⁴George, op.cit., p.202.

problems. So in 1968, for example, the Economic Development Board was re-organised; the Development Bank of Singapore (the name says it all) was set up, and in 1970 the Monetary Authority of Singapore was established to formulate and implement the nation's monetary policies. All these boom conditions and foreign capital enabled Singapore to move beyond the first labour-intensive stage of industrial development; breaking away from a "sweat-shop/cheap labour" image, the government tried to encourage more sophisticated industries which would develop the technical skills of the labour force. Educational policies were modified in the late 1970s to expand technical and computer education.

By the mid-1980s Singapore was no longer dependent on entrepot trade, as she had been up to the time of independence, but had a diversified economy based on commerce, industry and a tertiary service sector. Industry was steadily moving upmarket, enhancing the skills and earning capacity of her labour force. In addition to a large and increasingly prosperous professional and middle class, the mass of the population were literate, fully employed and decently housed. It was a healthy but materialistic and not particularly caring society, despite government attempts from the early 1980s to instil moral values by promoting religious instruction, and especially Confucianism, in schools...Singapore still largely followed the West in her economy, capitalist style of business, opposition to communism, promotion of free trade and respect for technology and modernization. Yet the republic was far from being a Western clone, and she rejected competitive politics, individualism and the concept of the welfare state.³⁵

This extended quote remains largely true for Singapore in the early 1990s. It boasts one of the highest living

³⁵Turnbull, op.cit., p.326.

standards in Asia; recently it was proudly reported that Singapore has been ranked the 18th richest nation in the world in per capita terms, using purchasing power parity (PPP), thus putting it ahead of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.³⁶ The economy is still thriving: growth was 8.3% in 1990, 6.7% in 1991, 5.8% in 1992, and the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong in his National Day message for 1993 reported "strong growth" of 10.1 % for the April-June quarter of 1993, leading to a projected 7.5 to 8 % growth for 1993 as a whole.³⁷ The Prime Minister calmly said "Our economy is doing well this year", and later in his speech made some comments on the present-day woes of the Western industrialised world.

So everyone in Singapore should be happy, shouldn't they, with the call for economic progress being met, and the demand for "more good things" apparently being fulfilled? We end this chapter with a look at the elections in Singapore, from 1968 to 1991, noting the issues from "the people" rising up to confront the PAP with each successive call for a fresh mandate to govern the country.

In 1968, with the Barisan Sosialis boycotting the general election, the PAP won all 58 of the parliamentary seats (51 were uncontested). The PAP also won every seat in the next 3 elections - 1972, 1976, and 1980 - scoring

³⁶The Straits Times, July 8, 1993. PPP essentially indicates the goods and services a country's currency can buy at home - Singapore's was US\$15,880.

³⁷The Straits Times, August 9, 1993.

between 69 and 75 % of the popular vote against the usual handful of 6 to 8 contesting opposition parties. J.B. Jeyaretnam of the Workers' Party ended the PAP's monopoly in Parliament when he won a by-election in the Anson constituency on October 31, 1981. This victory could be regarded as a turning-point of sorts because it shattered the myth of PAP invincibility, and at the same time both encouraged new opposition party efforts and stimulated the interest of Singaporeans in the concept of an opposition. In the by-election campaign, the PAP (perhaps believing in its invulnerability) made some decisions which angered the electorate: blocks of flats in Anson itself were demolished to build a new Port of Singapore Authority container complex, and this was not helped by the fact that the PAP Anson candidate was related to the head of the port Authority. Another factor may have been the Speak Mandarin campaign, which was unpopular with many of the 78% Chinese in Anson. The threat by a second-generation minister that the government might pull back on certain benefits for Anson if the PAP candidate was not elected, was obviously not well-received.

More surprises came in the December 1984 general elections. The PAP was determined to recapture the Anson seat, but it also brought into the election a series of again unpopular social-remedy policies. There was the raising of the CPF withdrawal age, which especially raised the hackles of the 45-to-55 age group, since they would now

have to wait longer before withdrawing their enforced savings, and even bitterly complained that they might not live long enough to enjoy the fruits of their labour! A compulsory health insurance scheme called Medisave, paid through a person's own CPF savings, was introduced. "Streaming" of students into faster or slower levels of learning (based on exam performance) was implemented at Primary 3 level. And there was the unforgettable "graduate mother" scheme of incentives which gave such mothers and some other educationally qualified women priority in registering their children for school at certain stages. This, and some other incentives came out of Lee Kuan Yew's views on the necessity for an elite talent pool, on the importance of heredity in producing talent, and from the observation that only a low percentage of female college and tertiary graduates were married - and those who were married were having less children than those women with primary or no education! This scheme was obviously branded as "elitist", opposed strongly as such, and the policy was abandoned in 1985.

The opposition parties had really little to offer in terms of alternative programmes or policies, but they apparently struck a responsive note with the electorate with the simple complaint that the PAP government was elitist, arrogant, continually meddling in one's personal life, and unfeeling. The election results left the opposition rejoicing and the PAP sombre and hurt. True,

only 2 seats were lost out of 79 - Jeyaretnam retained Anson, and Chiam See Tong, leader of the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) captured the Potong Pasir constituency - but the PAP was alarmed by its popular vote declining by 12.6% to 62.9 %, and it was clear that the electorate was delivering a loud protest to the government.

There were several developments in the political life of Singapore before the next election in 1988. On January 1, 1985 there was a "changing of the guards" in the cabinet which now comprised the successor/second generation of leaders, Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister, and two other "old guards". Goh Chok Tong, the first deputy prime minister, also stated that Lee would not be involved in the daily administration of the country, and that the new team did not expect to be overruled by Lee unless urgent issues were involved that affected national security.³⁸ The new team also affirmed that it intended to be more open and to consult the people on major issues, and admitted to mistakes in the past when criticisms had not been listened to, or government policies more fully explained. But it was reiterated that this new team did not want to be perceived as giving in to popular pressure or as seeking short-term popularity at the expense of long-term effectiveness

In early 1987 the government proposed the establishment of a "team MP system", which evolved into Group Representation Constituences (GRCs). This would mean

³⁸The Straits Times, January 1, 1985.

three constituencies being combined into a single "super" one, and each voter would have to choose between 3-person teams offered up by any party contesting in the GRC. All 3 candidates in a team would thus become MPs if they won that constituency. Combined with this GRC concept was also a plan to have MPs as town councillors to manage the Housing & Development Board (public housing) estates in the new town areas, and as such, to make local decisions directly affecting the lives of constituents. Bearing in mind the fact that 87% of the population lived in HDB flats, the PAP political rationale seemed obvious and logical: electors would be careful about voting for unqualified or potentially untrustworthy candidates (in other words, opposition candidates) if these people might become their own MPs and town councillors! The response was equally obvious and logical: the opposition and many Singaporeans complained before and during the Parliamentary Select Committee hearings in January 1988 that this plan was aimed at "fixing" the opposition by changing the electoral rules. The opposition consistently had problems attracting into its ranks good, qualified, and courageous candidates, and the need now to put up a 3-person team only compounded them. The government countered such charges by pointing out that the GRC teams would be required to include minorities (i.e. non-Chinese), and that Lee Kuan Yew had, as early as 1982, proposed such a system as a method of ensuring continued minority - especially Malay -

representation in Parliament. After much discussion, with some attendant unhappiness from the Malays and Indians at being singled out, the GRCs legislation was passed in Parliament in May 1988. The MP/town councils legislation was also passed one month later, in June.

Another major constitutional move raised in 1988 was the proposal for an elected president, to replace the customary "figurehead" president as head of state. When Lee Kuan Yew first mooted this idea in a National Day speech in 1984, critics said he wanted the job for himself. The issue next came up for debate in mid-1988 when the government presented the proposal before Parliament and issued a government white paper on the subject. And speculation that it as an institution was specially designed for Lee arose again. In July 1988 S.Rajaratnam, then a Cabinet Minister, said that Lee might be elected President within a year. In his National Day Rally speech that year, however, Lee dismissed such speculation, and ruled out himself becoming the first elected President.

The proposal provided for a President to be elected for a 6-year term in a nation-wide vote, and he would have powers beyond the largely ceremonial role played by previous Presidents. Chief among these powers is a veto on the government's Budget, as well as those of some statutory boards and key government companies, if they spent reserves accumulated during the term of a previous government in a manner which the President considers unwise or dangerous

for the welfare of the nation. The President could also veto or block appointments to key civil service posts. The proposal was thus intended as a safeguard in the event of the opposition gaining power because of a "freak" election result, and the fear that it could then raid the carefully built-up national reserves or dismantle quickly what the PAP considered the attributes of an honest civil service.

This proposed Elected President Bill became a key issue during the 1988 general election, debated hotly at rallies and in several television debates. A Parliamentary Select Committee was set up to gather feedback on the Bill, and 2 public hearings were held in November 1990. Finally the Bill, officially known as the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (Amendment No.3) Bill was passed into law on January 3, 1991.

81 seats were at stake in the September 3, 1988 general election, and the PAP found itself challenged for 70 of them. As before, the PAP campaigned on its record of achievements, this time under the slogan "More Good Years". The opposition, as usual, focused on alleged PAP repression and abuse of power (as in the 1987 arrests under the Internal Security Act of Catholic social workers, known as the "Marxist conspiracy"), and the need to check perceived authoritarianism in Singapore politics. Thus the Workers' Party's slogan was "It's Time!". The PAP won 80 of 81 seats, losing again Potong Pasir to the incumbent, Chiam of the SDP. (J.B. Jeyaretnam had lost his parliamentary seat

in November 1986 after being convicted for false declarations about his party accounts.) The PAP obtained 63.2 % of the total votes cast. The opposition had also nearly won a handful of seats, especially those with a high Malay vote. Prime Minister Lee seemed positive about the election result. The Sunday Times, September 4, 1988, reported him saying, "This is the people's verdict on the new guard...Their consultative style has won them support". There was already talk that Lee would step down as PM "within two years" of the 1988 election, and indeed it came to be. Lee Kuan Yew resigned as Prime Minister on November 26, 1990, and Goh Chok Tong was formally sworn in as the second Prime Minister of independent Singapore on November 28, 1990. Lee would then become Senior Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

The end of the 1980s saw a definite change in the nature of the electorate. There had been 215,000 new voters in 1984, and 206,000 new ones in 1988. They tended to be younger, English educated, middle class and therefore potentially less compliant and less accepting of authoritarianism, and interested in concepts of political rights and freedom, and political opposition.³⁹ How was the "new guard", the new team to respond or react to them? Although a new style of governing had been promised (more of consensus and openness), the new team had also shown it shares the same values, philosophies, and political ideas -

³⁹Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., pp.68,75.

the same substance - of Lee and the PAP "old guard". For example, after it had taken over in early 1985, it had been willing to take tough, controversial actions in a series of events soon after, including the "Marxist conspiracy", restricting the circulation of some foreign publications (including Time and Far Eastern Economic Review) for having "dabbled in local politics", and restricting the political activities of the Singapore Law Society. The new PM Goh Chok Tong decided to call for another general election, ahead of time, in a call to the people of Singapore to give him and his team a strong mandate to govern the nation. He wanted the PAP to improve on the 1988 results, and strongly stressed that anything less than a 65 % of the popular votes for the PAP would be considered a disappointment, and not the "strong" mandate he was seeking.

There were 81 seats this time, and on Nomination Day on August 21, 1991, the PAP retained 41 seats unopposed. The general election was held on August 31, with the final result being a victory for the PAP of 77 seats out of 81 - i.e. more than 95 % of the seats. And yet the PAP was clearly disappointed with the outcome. The total percentage of votes the PAP received this time was 61%; by most yardsticks a very credible result, but not to the PAP leaders. The Prime Minister expressed his feelings clearly at the Post-Elections Press Conference when he said "The results show that while the voters had given the PAP the mandate to govern Singapore, they have not given me the

clear endorsement I had hoped for...That solid endorsement did not come. I will have to study the detailed results, to reflect over them to understand the meaning and then to decide whether and how to continue with my open consultative style of government".⁴⁰ A veiled threat issued in the midst of despondency? It was not until November 17, 1991, at the PAP Convention that Goh showed he had got over his disappointment and was getting on with the task of governing the country. In a speech he said "...we in the Party and the Government have done very well...We can be proud of our achievements and of the fact that we have planned for the future." At the same time he found himself puzzled:

I cannot understand why Singaporeans are still so dissatisfied. Some give the reason that people now expect more. But I really don't know why. I'll be quite frank with you. I haven't thought of an answer. Mr. Lee was authoritarian, he came down very hard on people who gave wrong views. The Government has changed its style. It is now more open, consultative, friendly...Did the votes go up or go down? So what do people want? Year after year, our lives become better in terms of standards, in terms of incomes. The votes go down. So there is a negative correlation: The more open and friendly we are, the better we do for Singaporeans, the worse for votes.⁴¹

One answer to this "puzzlement" is simple: a large section of the voters obviously wanted an Opposition in Parliament. If this is so, then even if the PAP consistently performed credibly and efficiently, it would have to understand that

⁴⁰Business Times, (Malaysia), September 2, 1991.

⁴¹The Straits Times, November 18, 1991.

credible opposition candidates would continue to be voted into Parliament, if nothing more than to ensure that the government continues to deliver the goods "efficiently" and excellently!

And this brings into focus another major consequence of the 1991 election: that there were economic woes, in the midst of apparent plenty, among a sizable section of the populace. Premier Goh, 4 days after the election, himself commented that "style" of governing was of no matter to those who voted for the opposition. "Their concerns are bread-and-butter issues, and we are going to have to pay attention to them". He concluded that there was "a big group of Singaporeans who really only care about daily life - less taxes, less levies, cheap hospital charges, cheap educational services...All they are interested in is stability, progress and prosperity".⁴² This awareness of disaffection arising primarily from bread--and-butter issues was echoed later that same month by Dr. John Chen, then Chairman of the Publicity and Publications Committee of the PAP in an editorial printed in Petir, the PAP magazine. Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong cited as 1 of 4 broad groups who voted against the PAP, "those who could not improve their standard of living", in a speech to the Chinese Press Club on September 16. As a local political scientist puts it, while Singapore may be one of the richest countries in the world, and may have very

⁴²Ibid., September 5, 1991.

impressive foreign reserves, " yet to 80 per cent of the population these are meaningless as many of them still live a hand-to-mouth existence. The (General Election) demonstrated that there were many policies which the populace saw as nothing more than 'money-making' ones and they showed their anger by voting against the ruling party". He identifies policies relating to health, education, housing, transportation and telecommunications as those arousing anger as they were perceived to be more concerned with generating revenue rather than solving the people's problems.⁴³

There was also the implication from the election results that there was now a class problem; a class division existing in Singapore politics. As one writer noted, there were many Singaporeans were deprived and could not make it on their own no matter how hard they tried. Between the top 20% and the bottom 20% was an earning gap which was growing as a result of modernization. "So is class resentment. And unless it is raised, society may one day be split by class friction". Thus, the class dimension of Singapore politics could be discerned in two trends made evident in the 1991 election: "The first is that some of those who are left behind are becoming resentful of society and blaming the Government for their plight, as reflected in the recent general elections". Secondly, there are some

⁴³Bilveer Singh, Whither PAP's Dominance? An Analysis of Singapore's 1991 General Elections, (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), p.135.

who seek to pressurize the Government "to pull back the efforts of high achievers to allow themselves or their children to catch up". Since these people cannot "level up", they want the society to "level down to bring about an equalitarian society".⁴⁴ This "level down" phrase was used again, in a negative way, some time later by the Labour Minister Lee Boon Yang. He criticised the opposition Singapore Democratic Party for practising "politics of envy", and urged it to stop arousing the resentment of the poor against the rich. According to him, this would only divide society, and such politics would end up making every Singaporean poorer. "By doing so, the SDP is attempting to level down. Those who have worked harder, done better for themselves will be brought down. That will be the result of the SDP's politics of envy". This invective was in response to the SDP assistant secretary-general Chee Soon Juan who, in letters to The Straits Times, had portrayed the poor as a discontented lot in Singapore. The Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong also got into the act, ticking off the SDP in Parliament "for trying to play the haves against the have-nots" (surely an interesting, significant if defensive admission of class divisions in Singapore society), and cited figures to show that the Government's policies had indeed benefited the poor.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Seah Chiang Nee, Mirror of Opinion, September 4, 1991, No.202/91, p.6.

⁴⁵The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, March 20, 1993.

The 1991 election did, however, legitimised Goh Chok Tong and the second generation's leadership. They no longer had to feel themselves under the gigantic shadow of Lee Kuan Yew, although he continued to be influential both in the government and the country. However,

What the discourse on the 1991 Singapore GE has shown is that as Singapore progressed and became successful, it also exacerbated many gaps in the country, especially between the ruling party and the people. After more than 30 years of growth and progress, the country seemed to be experiencing the fallouts of success - physical and psychological dislocations, poverty in affluence and increasing alienation. There is no doubt that political, economic, ethnic and psychological divides exist in the country.⁴⁶

The political process goes on. On August 3, 1993 it was announced that the Deputy Prime Minister, Ong Teng Cheong had decided to run for the post of (the first elected) President of the Republic of Singapore. He had been nominated by the National Trades Union Congress, of which he is secretary-general. He thus resigned as DPM, as a member of Parliament, as PAP member, and as Chairman of the PAP on August 16 to be eligible for the election. Chua Kim Yeow, former Accountant-General and banker, also announced his intention to contest the coming election. He stated that he had been persuaded by former Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee and current Finance Minister Richard Hu to stand for election so that there would be a contest.

The unique aspect about this election lay in the fact that both candidates for the post of Elected President were

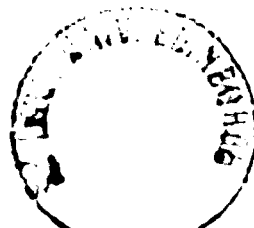
⁴⁶Singh, op.cit., p.173.

acceptable to the PAP Government, although the National Trades Union Congress was solidly behind Mr. Ong, who had been its chief for 10 years. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew both came out openly for Ong, with Goh even saying he wanted Mr. Ong to win.

The election was thus held on August 28, 1993 and Mr. Ong Teng Cheong won it with 58.7% of the valid votes. Mr. Chua Kim Yeow obtained (some would say, a surprising) 41.3 % of the votes. In the inevitable analysis that followed, several political observers commented they had expected Ong Teng Cheong to "perform better". Expectations had been that the new President would receive at least a 60% or even a 70 % win, but it was agreed that Ong's victory was enough to give him a clear mandate to be the President and to exercise the powers of an Elected President.

Could the 41.3 % of received votes be interpreted as a protest vote against the PAP Government? Some observers felt that Mr. Ong would have received more votes if not for his close connection to the PAP Government. Local sociologist Dr. Chiew Seen Kong commented: "I don't think it was a contest between two candidates as such, it was a question of the politics of the presidency. What it boiled down to was whether the people could accept a government man as President".⁴⁷ Indeed, the turning-point in the whole, rather smooth and dull, campaign may well have been the moment in his on-the-eve Election broadcast on

⁴⁷The Straits Times, August 30, 1993.



television when Chua Kim Yeow boldly asked voters if they wanted the PAP to also dominate the Presidency! His message must have articulated the unease many voters felt about Mr. Ong's PAP past, according to Nominated MP Kanwaljit Soin. And thus this could have cost Mr. Ong the support of two groups: firstly, those Singaporeans who believe on principle that the President should be non-partisan. Secondly, Singaporeans who wanted to voice their disquiet to the Government would have used their votes as protest ones. A lawyer noted: "Although a Presidential Election, there is a clear signal for the ruling party...You can't run away from the fact that Mr. Ong had the backing of the Prime Minister. So whether you like it or not, the vote is reflective of support for the Government". Political Science lecturer Hussin Mutalib agreed with this assessment: "I suspect many voters went for the election with somewhat the same mindset as for a General Election, seeing it as a party candidate versus a non-party candidate".⁴⁸

The Government has not commented much on such observations, other than saying that the people had understood the role of the Elected President and had expressed their choice accordingly, and that Chua Kim Yeow could get 41 % of the votes reflected well on the growing maturity of the electorate. Another stage (or drama) therefore accomplished in the political life of Singapore

⁴⁸Ibid.

as a nation, and one the PAP is happy with, remembering that the role of the Presidency was changed to enable greater protection for Singapore, as the city-state continues its brand of nation-building into the future.

CHAPTER II

IDEOLOGY, NATIONAL VALUES, AND NATION-BUILDING

A. The Relation Between the State and Ideology.

Does the PAP have an ideology, and if so, what exactly is it? If "ideology" is used in the everyday sense of a set of ideas, or a pattern of beliefs and concepts, integrated and coherent, seeking to explain complex social phenomena and also directed toward action - the answer can be "yes". The PAP does have a coordinated set of ideas, policies, events, plans, and beliefs, taken from several sources, yet constituting a system of interconnected and mutually reinforcing parts, and therefore not traceable to a single, logically consistent, and orthodox dogma. The PAP in the 1950s and 1960s did espouse "democratic socialism", with the Party's commitment to this concept being shown by providing adequate health, educational, and housing services and on the goal of attaining a more just and equitable society.¹

This last goal was important for the PAP when Singapore was part of Malaysia. In order to establish itself as a viable national, non-communal multi-racial political force, the PAP had to garner support from the (largely rural) Malays. The only basis this could be accomplished was to stress the PAP's "social democratic" character, its policies and programmes, emphasising a fair

¹Milne & Mauzy, op.cit. p.86.

distribution of the good things of life. This political context changed in 1965 when Singapore left Malaysia. The PAP was now ruling an independent city-state, and policies and priorities had to be based on the (now different) social and economic realities of Singapore. "Democratic socialism, beyond being a token symbolic faith, had little to offer although it had made sense when Singapore merged with Malaya."² To the PAP, Socialism was now irrelevant and of doubtful value in bringing about prosperity and progress for Singapore. In 1965, the year Singapore became independent, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, speaking at the Young Asian Socialist Conference in Bombay, opined that the reason why some of the non-socialist governments in Asia had made greater and more rapid economic progress than those that were staunchly socialist was that the former, "in the absence of constraints imposed by the socialist dogmas, had pursued more pragmatic, and therefore successful policies to cope with these problems". The lesson to the PAP leadership was that an inflexible adherence to socialism "would be a serious barrier to economic change and progress".³ Concentration was to be on economic expansion and growth, and social justice was exercised in the provision of minimum standards of education, health and housing for all Singaporeans through state action. In recent times, the Party has labeled its

²Vasil, op.cit. p.59.

³Ibid., p.60.

ideology "socialism in the final analysis"; this meaning a mixture of state capitalism (or "market socialism")⁴, company welfarism, and socioeconomic self-reliance, meaning less reliance on government welfare. This last point can be seen in the way the PAP, in recent years, has been increasingly moving towards a "user pay" principle. The underlying thinking is since most of the people are now enjoying greatly improved standards of living, full employment, and high levels of income - thanks to economic progress achieved under PAP rule - they themselves can afford to pay the full or near-full cost of health, housing and education. To the PAP, it does not make sense to tax the people and then spend the revenue on these very amenities, and the Party regards this increasing transfer of this responsibility to the Singapore people as a part of the nation's success story and a measure of its achievements. "You pay for what you want, and what you get is what you are willing to pay for", and from April 1994, a new indirect taxation scheme, the Goods and Services Tax (similar to the United Kingdom's VAT) of 3% will be implemented. The state will continue, however, to provide welfare, though on a diminishing scale, to those who are just not able to provide for themselves or their families.

The PAP has never pretended it practises any liberal version of Western-style democracy. Singapore is democratic

⁴Perhaps similar to Japan's "Cooperative capitalism", with the government allied with business, and with unions non-confrontational and cooperative.

in that certain sets of institutions are present, and certain democratic processes are practised, such as periodic general elections where the government seeks a fresh mandate from the people. Political stability is always a PAP top priority (then and now) because it is a perceived prerequisite for development and continued economic progress. The rule of law and the requirements of order are put ahead of the protection of individual freedoms; any sacrifice of any such freedoms is for the good of the whole or the community, a concept very much a part of Asian political cultures. There tends to be a constant apprehension about the transferability of "Western" or Westminster democracy to an Asian society.

And if nothing else but to show that certain political fundamentals or principles remain the same for the PAP even after 28 years of Singapore nation-building, in November 1992 Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, now Senior Minister (and presumably in his role as Senior Statesman), reiterated that democracy cannot guarantee good government. He was speaking at a forum on nation states in the changing world held in Tokyo, Japan, and it would be instructive to summarise comprehensively here what he said in Japan, since to a very great extent even today, the PAP's beliefs and values reflect closely Lee's own beliefs.

The subject he was asked to address was democracy and human rights, in particular whether democracy had universal validity, a theme he had focused on in many past speeches

and interviews. He challenged the notion that American and European standards of democracy and human rights could apply to other nations and said what people everywhere needed was good government. At the same time he cautioned developed nations against using foreign aid to try converting developing countries into democracies or pressure them on human rights. Western nations, he stated, should not force the pace of change unless they were prepared, when a target delinquent government collapsed, to intervene directly and help put that country back together again.

Lee did not think that the preconditions necessary for democracy to work, such as the existence of civil society and an educated electorate, were to be found anywhere outside the developed nations. The crucial point was that people who disagreed over issues must be able to live with their differences, and cooperate with one another. Applying these pre-conditions, it was not difficult to see why democracy had such a chequered history in Asia, and Lee mentioned Thailand, the Philippines, and Pakistan as examples. He felt it was just not realistic to expect developing nations, many of them former colonies with none of the required cultural or historical factors, to become democracies upon independence when democracy took some 200 years to evolve in the United States and Britain. In fact, he said, there was no guarantee that the present democracies would survive if there was a prolonged world

depression, given that several in Europe had given way to dictatorships when hard times struck in the 1930s. A country must first have economic development, and then democracy might follow - here, perhaps implicitly referring to Singapore's own history. "With a few exceptions, democracy has not brought good government to new developing countries...Democracy has not led to development because the governments did not establish the stability and discipline necessary for development".

What good government was depended on the values of a people. As an Asian of Chinese cultural background, Lee Kuan Yew's were for an honest government effective and efficient in protecting its people and allowing opportunities for all to advance themselves. And the people would indeed advance themselves in a stable and orderly society where they could live a good life and raise their children to do better than they. Lee said that while democracy and human rights were worthwhile ideas, people should be clear that the real objective was good government. On how a developing country could get a good government, Lee said there was a valuable lesson to learn from the British and American examples of giving votes, in the early stages of their democracy, only to those who were educated or who had properties. "Such an approach can be criticised as elitist but the chances of getting a good government will be better", he said. Next, for good government, the leaders, whether elected or otherwise, must

have a sense of being trustees for the people.

In his concluding remarks, Lee said the underlying assumption of democracy that all men and women were equal or should be equal was flawed. It was not realistic, and to insist on it must lead to regression. "This is a dilemma. Do we insist on ideals when they do not fit into practical realities of the world as we know it? Or do we compromise and adjust to realities? On balance, if I were a Japanese, I would like my government to assess countries on the substance of good government rather than the forms of democracy. Of course good government includes humane and civilised standards of behaviour".⁵

Some key words or phrases can be picked out from what Lee Kuan Yew is reported to have said, and can help elaborate what may be identified as major sources or components of the PAP ideology: "good government, economic development, stability and discipline necessary for development, values of a people, effective and efficient, opportunities for all to advance themselves, stable and orderly society, a good life, those who were educated...who had properties, elitist, compromise and adjust to realities". These words and phrases become understandable if one accepts three compatible and overlapping concepts as sources of the PAP ideology and system of values: elitism, Confucianism, and pragmatism.

⁵The Straits Times (Weekly Overseas Edition), November 21, 1992.

Elitism as a political concept for Singapore means that the "best" should be the leaders of the nation; those few who are the brightest, wisest, most able, and virtuous in that society. And with such qualities present, it would then only be natural and rational that decisionmaking should be from the top down, while acknowledging that the leaders should be moral examples "without reproach". Key characteristics required by the PAP of new leaders include the following: integrity, good character, incorruptibility, ability to think and innovate, capacity to administer and govern, ability to work as a team, and ability to take tough decisions and stand pressure.⁶ The process of selection is elaborate, and the prospective "leaders" are checked out thoroughly. Lee Kuan Yew and the other PAP leaders are thus elitist in the sense of strongly believing that those who govern Singapore should be the most talented and intelligent available, and that identifying, training, and recruiting them into government service should not be left to chance or even "to depend on the democratic processes".⁷ At a Young PAP (the Youth wing of the Party) dinner on September 10, 1993, the present Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong remarked that democracy was more likely to produce an efficacious government if parliamentary election candidates had to be as qualified as presidential candidates (who must satisfy a Presidential

⁶Vasil, op.cit., p.158.

⁷Ibid., p.157.

Elections Committee that they are men of integrity and good character and have a proven record in administrative and financial matters). This, he said, would weed out incompetent, weak and flawed candidates. The prospect of imposing eligibility criteria for those aspiring to be Members of Parliament, or of having to meet pre-selection tests, was thus raised. There have been, of course, reactions to Premier Goh's remarks. University law lecturer Valentine Winslow said that the premise of having eligibility criteria seemed to be that the electorate was to be distrusted. "A democracy allows the widest number of people to stand. But if you have a committee limiting that number, you are limiting the freedom of choice. It should be for the people to decide, not the Government, on what kind of Parliament they want...Who would be on (any eligibility criteria committee) and how would they decide what was good character and integrity, qualities listed by Mr. Goh?...When you start talking about integrity and good character, you apply subjective criteria which must necessarily be decided by the people if you believe in democracy".⁸ One suspects that Mr. Winslow may, by various government spokespersons and in future issues of The Straits Times, be accused of holding "unrealistic Western-liberal" understandings of what "democracy" should be and is in "Asian" Singapore. There is the constant anxiety (in the minds of the PAP leadership) that unrestrained

⁸The Straits Times, September 13, 1993.

"democracy" can easily degenerate into mob rule. Or as Mr. Lee Kuan Yew has said, democracy does not guarantee good government, so one can postulate the PAP answering remarks such as Winslow's by reaffirming that there is democracy, in that the citizens of Singapore can choose, but it may not be wise for the ordinary person to have too much choice in that it will become too "subjective", and the people of Singapore may not know what indeed is "wise" and "good" for them. Participation must necessarily be curtailed. The "(Confucian) Father Knows Best", so after explaining what the problem is, and what the government may decide to do about it, the citizen is expected to do his or her part, which is to obey (after all, the people did elect their government, which has always delivered the goods). As for what "integrity" and "good character" is - why, just look at your own PAP government leaders, for they are indeed examples of such qualities, and they got to where they are now, precisely because of strict eligibility criteria set by the PAP itself. So what is wrong with proposing such criteria for Parliament; for "the brightest and the best" Members of Parliament for the sake and good of the country? "Rational" elitism PAP style (sooner or later) wins the day.

Although elitism tends to be a negative concept in "Western" eyes, where it seems to dismiss the "common man", and is therefore "undemocratic", there is a grounding of the concept in the basically Chinese political culture that

is Singapore political culture - which means also, to note the government's Confucian view of itself.⁹ Elitism is essential to Confucian political philosophy, which asserts that people are not born equal (again, cf. Lee Kuan Yew's remarks in Tokyo about democratic ideas of men and women being equal as "flawed" and "unrealistic"), but are born having different capabilities, thus leading to a few being born to rule and the rest to follow and be ruled.

The PAP leadership thus shows its elitist values in its (commonly called) "paternalistic" style of governing ("stability and discipline necessary for development"), in its commitment to meritocracy ("opportunities for all to advance themselves" but no "welfarism"), and in policies such as the graduate mother scheme. As elites, the PAP leaders are confident that they alone understand what the problems are, they alone have the dedication and ability to solve them, their policies and programmes have been rationally decided by the best technocratic minds in Singapore, so all that is left is for the people to listen, understand, and comply. In the best Confucianist tradition, the PAP ministers and leaders take their role as educators seriously: they are constantly explaining government policies rather than listening too much to public views; to get them to listen, the right approach is needed: "...a conflict and bargaining ethos is discouraged; rather, a

⁹John Clammer, Singapore: Ideology, Society, Culture (Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1985), p.161.

petitionary one is nurtured as the way to approach a paternalistic political authority".¹⁰ Elitism in government thus implies that it is government performance ("good government") that is self-justifying and all-important; paternalism is for a purpose.

...through state authoritarian rule and intervention the appropriate responses could be found for national cohesion and for the reform of a society originally created to serve the interests of the colonial power. The authority of the virtuous government depends on the willingness of its citizens...to give their collective support to those who provide them with stability, employment, housing and social services, and these citizens might feel less attracted to individual freedoms as these are understood in parliamentary democracies.¹¹

Confucianism: As has been stated, the Confucianist political tradition is elitist. It also contains key political concepts which continue to be relevant to the mainly Chinese political culture and system that is Singapore.¹² There is a hierarchical order which enables a harmonious universe, namely paternal benevolent rule by the most virtuous and able, and deference and obedience to this authority. There is thus an ordered or structured hierarchy of unequals in such a society, and all within it have their own roles or functions to play for the cooperative harmony and good of all. Duties and obligations are the key ideas in understanding action, rather than any Western concept of

¹⁰Chan Heng Chee, The Dynamics of One Party Dominance (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1976), p.232.

¹¹Regnier, op.cit., p.240.

¹²See Chan, op.cit., pp.228-233.

"rights". The Confucianist tradition also stresses respect for study, learning and education, the merit principle, filial piety, and an understanding of the state as an extension of the family (regarded as the basic unit of society), rather than it being a collection of individuals. The state is a moral order guided by laws, implemented in seemingly paternalistic and authoritarian ways by the new "mandarins" - the bureaucrats, and backed by the strong but subtle threat of force. Rule is by the "Mandate of Heaven", and to maintain this legitimacy, such rule must meet accepted concepts of "good government" and operate for the benefit and welfare of the people, enabling "a good life" for them. Peace, stability, security, and prosperity are thus basic requirements which should be provided by morally upright and trustworthy leaders.¹³ "The style and policies of the PAP political leadership at the top appear to be aligned closely with the central tenets of the Confucian political and moral tradition. Yet the leaders still manage to function as rational, technologically oriented, secular modernizers".¹⁴

As will be pointed out in section (B) of this chapter, Singapore's leaders have been worried about the influence of "negative" Western values in Singapore society and culture, and have tried to just adapt and appropriate the

¹³See for example, D.Howard Smith, Confucius (Herts: Paladin, 1973), pp.29-30, 68-79.

¹⁴Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., pp.111-112.

best of Western science and technology, but reject values they consider as obstacles to progress and modernisation. They hope, in so doing, to be able to retain "good, traditional, Asian" values and cultural identities as a barrier against any negative Western influences. That this is a difficult balance to achieve and maintain is revealed by the constant calls by the government not to forsake one's cultural roots and "Asian values".¹⁵ The government has thus sponsored and promoted, in recent years, a revival of Confucianism. Measures taken included having Confucianism as one of the subjects for moral studies in school, establishing the Institute of East Asian Philosophies, organising (as the Government did in 1991) and participating in international conferences on Confucianism, and promoting awareness and discussion of, Confucian or "Asian" values in the media. We shall later see whether creating a national ideology may also be part of this sponsored revival of Confucianism.

Be that as it may, the efforts by the Government to construct a Singaporean state "produces technocrats who identify with the ideal of Confucianist ethics; in other words an administration which cares above all that the population should conform to the rules of good social conduct defined by the elders (Lee Kuan Yew and the first

¹⁵The latest "call" is for "family values", to be based broadly on "Asian Values", and which should be spelt out to help reinforce and promote them among Singaporeans, as suggested by Community Development Minister Yeo Cheow Tong, and reported in The Sunday Times, September 12, 1993.

generation of PAP leaders). A Chinese cultural tradition of the mandarin type contributes to this regulation of daily life and of morality, which the great majority of Singaporeans seemed to accept so far".¹⁶

A sociologist has postulated "three legs" in Singapore's "central ideology": the necessity for economic growth, the corollary of political stability and authority, and the monopoly of the definition of culture, and argues that the "something" which makes all this possible is "the basic Chineseness of Singapore".

Expressed politically this involves such notions as the acceptance of a strong government so long as it deliver the goods, lack of interest in personal political involvement, acceptance of a very paternalistic style of government, acceptance of bureaucratic rule, unwillingness to join the opposition unless the government is clearly in serious disorder and high tolerance of change and personal discomfort. In many respects the Chinese voluntary associations and the Chinese family are microcosms of the state. To a great extent Singapore already is a Confucian state.¹⁷

Pragmatism: The PAP leaders may be elitist in their particular values and visions, but they also stress what they call pragmatism and flexibility in reaching for their objectives, and perhaps even to "compromise and adjust to realities". The underlying notion is that external challenges of various kinds justify such a permanent attitude of pragmatism, flexibility and adaptability. Such

¹⁶Regnier, op.cit., p.241.

¹⁷John Clammer, The Sociology of Singapore Religion (Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1991), pp.18-19.

pragmatism thus means that the PAP government does not allow itself to be trapped in political dogma, because that can result in paralysis when there is a need for action, and the leaders should be able to revise their decisions if circumstances change. Hence the constant attention to "effectiveness", "efficiency"; the commitment to results and the acid test of performance - "the test has never been ideological consistency at the expense of efficiency".¹⁸ An example of this was in 1985 when Singapore was in a recession. The government at first was not willing to reduce the Central Provident Fund (a compulsory social security savings scheme) contribution rate, but after studying the recessionary economic trends, it reduced the employers' contributions to cut production costs and make them "competitive". This was done after the National Trade Union Congress helped to persuade its unions and their worker-members to accept the (in effect) reduced income-savings as a "sacrifice" for the sake of the nation's economic health, with a promise that the government would restore the full rate of contributions to the CPF once the recession was over. Singapore did come out of its recession by 1987, and that was seen as another success in its "pragmatic" approach to problems. Confucian political thought has this strong pragmatic strain, of course - a policy has value if it works or succeeds, in accordance with the natural order and moral ends.

¹⁸Milne & Mauzy, op.cit., p.113.

A perhaps more cynical note can be expressed by saying that "the lack of any apparent long term plan, the frequent changes in policy, are often explained not as negative features, but as positive ones: as pragmatism rather than as short-sightedness". Pragmatism can become a strange form of justification, "since its existence suggests that the techniques of social engineering and managerialism are not so effective after all, although its being put forward as a "philosophy" of course disguises this, although analysis shows it to be very functionally linked with and a reflection of general policy with an ill-defined goal".¹⁹ The PAP government will certainly deny this: it may indeed "zig-zag" towards what it has deemed as objectives or goals, but it will not easily give up on ideas or policies regarded as essential for the nation.

And the necessity for order and control, expressed in "the hegemony of the State: its ubiquitousness and intervention at every level of life from the most private to the most public"²⁰ can, of course, be justified as part of the "pragmatic" running of the state. One (by now familiar) reason given for the need of such societal control is that political stability and the demands of economic growth, which go together and justify one another, require great central planning and control. Another implicit assumption is that the people cannot be trusted to

¹⁹Clammer, Singapore: Ideology..., pp.167-168.

²⁰Ibid., p.160.

make their own decisions and need therefore to be told what is good for them - the overlapping concept of elitism and paternalism seen here again. An obvious example of this latter point is seen in the continuous organisation of public campaigns to impress on the whole population awareness of certain issues and themes, and as such, emphasising certain weaknesses in the social order and behaviour. Past themes have included productivity, cleanliness, family planning, work, and the limitations of Western values. In September 1993 three campaigns were more or less going on at the same time in Singapore: (1) Courtesy - "If we could only see ourselves sometimes!" (i.e. don't pile up your plate at buffet meals, and do give up your seat on the bus or train to the old or pregnant), (2) Learn and Speak Mandarin in Business (the television commercial assures us that we will have the winning edge over our competitors if we do), and (3) Keep Fit and Healthy - "The Great Singapore Workout!" (a set of aerobic exercises designed for everyone, published in the press, broadcast on TV, and available at a low cost on video and audiocassette, lasting 15 minutes and guaranteed to burn off 100 calories if you know what's good for you, and do it). Flippant remarks aside, all these campaigns are certainly meant by the PAP to be edifying, seeking to change collective behaviour for the better, thus hopefully and progressively bringing about a Singaporean identity, and using language and symbols aimed at suppressing what to

the government are undesirable attitudes and therefore promoting a more disciplined, rational, "stable and orderly society where they could live a good life and raise their children to do better than they" (Lee Kuan Yew in Tokyo).

One can indeed ask whether there is an immediate correlation between such government exhortations and campaigns and the true feelings of the citizens at the "grassroots" (a term much used by the PAP). The government in such campaigns is merely being true to its Confucian and Chinese cultural assumptions: that if leaders or those in authority give what they believe to be good social advice or directives, then their followers should accept without question such advice for their own self-improvement and benefit. The response of ordinary Singaporeans may well be more dismissive or sceptical in the face of a seemingly endless series of such campaigns. Often it appears that support of and compliance with such campaigns is given only because of the presence of punitive measures to enforce the exhortations and campaigns. An example is that of littering which, according to PAP Members of Parliament, is still "rampant" in Singapore despite campaigns and tough laws (which included the introduction of "Corrective Work Orders" in November 1992, requiring offenders to clean up public areas) and the government was called to take even more measures against this "anti-social act". As reported in The Straits Times of March 22, 1995, one MP even "wondered why there was still 'a sizeable number of

incorrigible, recalcitrant litterbugs' after 30 years of relentless public education and campaigns". The answer may well be that many Singaporeans just stopped listening to the constant hectoring by their government, irrespective of the relative merits of such campaigns. Still, this has not stopped the PAP government from planning further campaigns, even if it is aware of this general attitude of indifference at the "grassroots".

To sum up: Elitism, Confucianism and Pragmatism are compatible sources of a PAP ideology at work today. It is still interesting though to look at what a prominent local political scientist tried to identify as the elements of the PAP ideology back in 1969, four years after Singapore became independent.²¹ According to the writer, the PAP firmly believed then that the survival of Singapore would depend on the willingness and ability of the Singapore citizen to adopt a new set of attitudes and values, in short, to become "a new man". For this to be possible, the people would have to be aware of several themes. Firstly, there would have to be the creation of a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. Secondly, there is to be the creation of a "tightly organized society", consisting of Singapore's ability to have maximum mobilization of all the nation's capabilities, as well as having "a system of organisation that would permit

²¹Chan Heng Chee, "Singapore: The Ideology of Survival", Commentary, (University of Singapore Society), Vol.2 No.1, May 1969, pp.1-3.

penetration into the society to exercise control over population". Allied with this is the building of a Singapore "rugged society" - "a new generation imbued with resolution, determination and dedication to training and skill and discipline". And finally the PAP "urges the Singapore population to come to terms with change as a value in life". Chan here is explicit in her comments: "In so doing, the PAP whether consciously or unconsciously is preparing a justification for any policy changes in the future. Using change as the rationale the government can justify otherwise politically motivated actions under the pretext of public interest". We have seen that this remains relevant and valid today, under the principle of "pragmatism".

What about the other "themes"? That of a multi-racial, multi-cultural society remains essential; it is inextricably linked to questions of social cohesion, internal security, and stability. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Singapore cannot be understood or isolated from her geographical and cultural context. Thus the creation and maintenance of a multi-racial society echoes the concern to prevent Singapore falling prey to any new wave of communalist agitation in, or from, its Malay neighbours. Singapore has a sizeable Malay minority - 15% of the population - and the government is well aware that any attempt at domination of the Singapore Malays by the Chinese majority would not be looked on favourably by

Malaysia and Indonesia. Singapore is also aware of the anti-Chinese sensitivities in these two countries and their desire to protect the Malay population and culture. Multiracialism and racial harmony thus continue to be major components of Singapore's efforts at national integration, and indeed, as will be spelt out in the next section, have been identified as one of the core "shared values".

Singapore continues to be a "tightly organized society" today, and "order" and "control" as key concepts remain in vogue. This remains true today for the call in 1969 for "dedication to training and skill and discipline", and was brought out succinctly by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in his 1993 National Day Rally speech. He stated that there was a problem of low-skilled workers losing their jobs, there was a need for retraining, and if Singaporeans did not upgrade their skills, they would be left behind in the global scramble for investments and jobs. In the best Confucian leadership manner, he used himself as an example (and as Prime Minister, has himself set the example for Singaporeans to follow): "It is hard to think of re-training, I know. At 52 years old, I am spending more than eight hours a week learning Mandarin and Malay. And I can tell you it is tough". But he hoped that others his age would make the effort to acquire the skills they needed to take on new jobs. "Don't be caught like many workers in the West who have not been retrained and whose jobs are gone forever", adding that skills upgrading would fight the

problem of income disparity in Singapore.²² In 1965 or 1969 and today, the concern with all these values, and the PAP ideology, continue to be tied up with the continuing goal of building a modern, constantly economically viable state, and with creating a truly "Singaporean" nation state.

The PAP has been governing Singapore since 1959, and from 1965 (independence) till 1981 it was the only political party in Parliament - "one party dominance" indeed, using Chan Heng Chee's book title. The histories of the Singapore "nation" and of the PAP have become very closely associated with each other. Hence any "national" or "state" ideology - official or unofficial - and the PAP ideology is also inextricably mixed. It was in late 1988 that the PAP government proposed moves to formulate an official national ideology, and to adopt it to reinforce what to it were important Asian values not fully emphasised in present national symbols. The next section deals with these "shared values", which were to make up this national ideology.

B. What Do The "Shared Values" Promote?

The attempt to concretize and formulate a National Ideology was first brought into prominence in a speech given by Mr. Goh Chok Tong, then first Deputy Prime Minister, at the PAP Youth Wing Charity Night on October 28, 1988. It was made clear that if there was to be a

²²The Straits Times, August 16, 1993.

National ideology, its purpose was to preserve what was called "core values". Goh's speech was entitled "Our National Ethic",²³ and the basic question he raised in it was, how do we preserve our Asian values when we are daily exposed to alien influences? The answer, in his view, was to formalise our values in a national ideology, to be taught in schools, workplaces and homes as our way of life. "Then we will have a set of principles to bind our people together and guide them forward". One can ask, "for what?".

Noting that the Indonesians and the Malaysians had their national ideologies, Goh said those were formal statements of the key axioms and premises on which their society was based. He said: "We should have a clear statement of our national ethic to prevent our society from drifting aimlessly into the 21st century...This is the next challenge of the Government and the Party - formalising our national ethic and inculcating it in all citizens. Then we can determine what Singapore will be in the 21st century. We are part of a long Asian civilisation and we should be proud of it. We should not be assimilated by the west, and become a pseudo-western society. We should be a nation that is uniquely multiracial and Asian, with each community proud of its traditional culture and heritage".²⁴

He commented that the Youth Wing of the PAP could play

²³Goh Chok Tong, "Our National Ethic", Speeches Vol.12 No.5, September - October 1988, pp.12-15.

²⁴Ibid., p.15.

an active part in organising activities and projects that could contribute to a better understanding of the importance of retaining "our" traditional culture and heritage. "You will be around in the 21st Century", he said, "You want to retain your Chineseness, Malayness and Indianess within the framework of a tolerant, multiracial Singaporean society".

Like then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Goh was concerned about Singaporeans' changing values, as they became more affluent, more English-educated, traveled more widely, read foreign newspapers and journals, and listened to the BBC and watched American television programmes. "In short, we are assimilating outside influences daily. What kind of values will our children have? Malay, Indian, Chinese or Western values? What if our values are Western? Will they strengthen or weaken us?" He noted, "Over the last decade, there has been a clear shift in our values", as detected by two Members-of-Parliament, Dr. Aline Wong and Dr. Ow Chin Hock, both on the staff of the National University of Singapore. "There is a clear shift towards emphasis on self, or individualism. If individualism results in creativity, that is good, but if it translates into a 'me first' attitude, that is bad for social cohesion and the country".²⁵

Mr. Goh said there was concern about the shift away from group interests because it will determine the national

²⁵Ibid., pp.13-14.

competitiveness, and hence the prosperity and survival of Singapore as a nation. He mentioned he had started reading a book entitled "Ideology and National Competitiveness" written by two Harvard professors, George Lodge and Ezra Vogel, which argued that the national competitiveness of a country was affected by whether its people were more "communitarian" or "individualistic". "Every society has both these elements, but each differs in the dominance of one over the other. In Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, communitarianism dominates individualism. This has allowed them to catch up economically with the industrial West in the last 20 years. Japan, because of its communitarian value, is unbeatable, according to Ezra Vogel".

Singaporeans therefore have to determine the sort of society they want to be in the 21st Century - more communitarian or more individualistic. "The answer, of course, depends on which is better for our national competitiveness or survival". Goh commented that Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew provided the answer when he addressed the Global Strategies Conference on October 24, 1988. Referring to the key factors that made the Japanese the first of the East Asian peoples to catch up with the industrialised West, Mr. Lee spoke of their attributes for high group performance and their emphasis on hard work as well as being business oriented, highly competitive and pragmatic. The other East Asians - the Koreans, Chinese and Vietnamese - are not inferior in these qualities. All those

countries have strong social cohesion. "They have learnt the valuable lesson that to make the greatest progress in the shortest possible time, it is necessary for a people to move in unison. And this implies the need for individuals to make sacrifices for the good of the country and its progress".

Mr. Goh said that like Japan and Korea, Singapore was a high performance country because "We share the same cultural base as the other successful East Asians, that is, Confucian ethic. We have the same core values which made the Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese succeed. If we want to continue to prosper we must not lose our core values such as hard work, thrift, and sacrifice".²⁶ Prosperity, in short, is due to the presence of Confucian values.

It was next up to Trade and Industry Minister, Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong (and present Deputy Prime Minister) to take the discussion on a National Ideology to a new phase by spelling out and seeking to examine comprehensively what he believed were the central issues involved - what the National Ideology is and what it is not, why the need for it and how it can be transmitted to Singaporeans. He did this when delivering the third Alumni International Singapore Lecture.²⁷

He defined the National Ideology as "the

²⁶Ibid., p.15.

²⁷Lee Hsien Loong, "The National Identity - a direction and identity for Singapore", Speeches, Vol.13 No.1, January - February 1989, pp.26-38.

characteristic ethos and spirit of a people. It is the core values which the community shares, and which distinguish them from other peoples and countries. It is the beliefs which underpin their social and political institutions".²⁸ He stressed that the National Ideology was not Confucianism by another name, nor was it a ruse for imposing Chinese Confucian values on the minority communities.²⁹ And (a necessary disclaimer, one supposes) the National Ideology could not, what he called "one sceptical doubt" had expressed, be a scheme to perpetuate, or perpetrate, rule by the PAP.³⁰

He began by defining the problem which the formulation of a National Ideology was intended to solve. "In one word, Westernisation", he said. With universal English education, Singapore had become a totally open society and the next generation was growing up with values and outlook different from their parents'. He said, "As a society, we are absorbing ideas from outside faster than we can digest them, and in danger of losing our sense of direction". While noting that Westernisation had, in the short run, contributed to economic growth, he saw many dangers ahead as Singapore was not the United States or Europe. "Although we are in close contact with the Western world, our values and expectations, and our responses to challenges as a

²⁸Ibid., p.30.

²⁹Ibid., p.34.

³⁰Ibid., p.36.

people, have so far been different from Westerners". The problem was not unique to Singapore, BG Lee said, pointing out that every non--Western developing country had to ponder "how to modernise without losing its soul, how to transform itself without undermining the basis of the whole society". Noting that not all societies had risen to the challenge, he said: "Singapore's problem is: how to be cosmopolitan, but yet not be rootless; how to have an open mind and be forward and outward-looking, but still keep a clear sense of identity and self-confidence?"³¹

The answer or solution was in building a strong sense of Singapore identity. There was a need for a "clear set of values, strongly held and shared by Singaporeans" to help develop an identity to bond Singaporeans together and to determine their future. "With a common understanding of what we as Singaporeans believe in, we can absorb what we want from the practices of other countries, without blindly following irrelevant American or European standards".³²

Since Singapore was multi-racial and multi-religious, no single religion could be chosen as a basis for a common identity. The approach thus, must be to respect and recognise Singapore's diversity of cultures and religions and to create unity out of it. This involves a three-fold task: "to find common values which all can share, to preserve the heritages of our different communities, and to

³¹Ibid., pp.28,29.

³²Ibid., pp.29-30.

ensure that each community also appreciates and is sensitive to the traditions of the others". A "faster way" in setting out the core values would be for all to become "equally decultured and Westernised", and therefore to grow more similar to one another. Although he thought this would be welcomed by a minority of "highly-Westernised" Singaporeans, BG Lee doubted if it would be accepted by the majority of the population, or the minority communities. It has to be a "slow and difficult process" - drawing on the essence of Singapore's heritages, identifying certain abstract values common to and capable of being shared by all Singaporeans, and then to interpret and convey these ideas to each community in terms of its own cultural and religious traditions. "In time, very gradually, all communities can develop more common, distinctively Singaporean characteristics".³³

Stressing that these core values should be non-political and non-religious, he said the four items identified in the President's Address at the opening of Parliament on Monday, January 9, 1989 were an "adequate starting point for a National Ideology". The values - (1) "community over self"; (2) "upholding the family as the basic building block of society"; (3) "resolving major issues through consensus instead of contention"; and (4) "stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony" - were compatible with the major cultures in Singapore.

³³Ibid., pp.30-31.

Responding to the view that Singapore's ideals had already been incorporated into the state flag and the National Pledge, BG Lee said neither the five stars on the flag, nor the Pledge identified what personal values Singaporeans must have to bring about the ideals. "The National Ideology will do so, and complement both".³⁴

To suggestions that Singaporeans should be "citizens of the world, comfortable everywhere but belonging nowhere in particular, upholding universal values and feeling a brotherhood with all mankind", BG Lee answered: "We belong to a time and a place, with a past which we should be proud of, and a future which is ours to make. If we are not aware of this, within one generation, or at most two, the spirit of Singapore will disappear, the society will dissolve, and the nation will be no more...No group of people can jettison their past, embrace another culture, and survive intact...It is one way for individuals to survive, but not for a whole society".³⁵ Singapore must therefore "take a conservative but not unquestioning approach: Retain our own heritages, but examine them for values which need to be modified, and scrutinise foreign traditions for ideas which can be incorporated, but do so cautiously. Our roots are important. We should not be root-bound, but neither should we abandon our roots. They anchor us, and will help us

³⁴Ibid., p.31.

³⁵Ibid., p.32.

grow".³⁶

Coming to the sensitive issue of the role of Confucianism, Lee admitted that some Singaporeans from the minority communities had reacted rather hesitantly to the idea of a National Ideology, fearing that it would be a disguise for imposing Chinese Confucian values on them. He revealed how when Mr. Goh Chok Tong first raised the subject (in his speech "Our National Ethic", as reported earlier), some Chinese newspapers had seen it as the elevation of Confucian ethics to a national status. This misunderstanding had to be dispelled, and the relationship between the National Ideology and Confucian ethics clarified.

Thus: "The National Ideology is for all the communities, while Confucian ethics is not. But the Chinese community, in order to elaborate the abstract values of the National Ideology into concrete examples and vivid stories, must draw upon Confucian concepts, for several reasons: It is the heritage of the Chinese part of our population. It stresses the importance of placing society above self, a key value we want to preserve. And many Confucian ideals are still relevant to us".³⁷ "However, the National Ideology cannot just be Confucianism by another name". And the Government could not force Confucianism on the other communities, or allow it to lead to Chinese chauvinism,

³⁶Ibid., p.33

³⁷Ibid., p.34

narrowing the outlook of Chinese Singaporeans and making them intolerant of others. "The Government has never let the majority race impose itself on the minority communities in Singapore. It does not intend to do so now". It also recognised that Confucianism did not have a monopoly of virtues and must be brought up to date and reconciled with other ideas such as democracy and the rule of law, "which have already become part of our ethos".

BG Lee also said that although the National Ideology embodied non-political, personal values, it could not be completely separated from the politics of Singapore. "It must complement, not replace, our system of democracy. Singapore cannot be governed effectively except by a democratically elected government. Without the consent of the people, no government can achieve anything...However, democracy is not an automatic formula for political success. To make it work, the people need to have the right values, understanding and sense of responsibility. Our core values should contribute to this".³⁸ For the Chinese community, Confucian values must be reconciled with the concepts of democracy. Confucian values could not substitute for participatory and consensual democracy, or be used as a tool to keep the population cowed and submissive. "In a democracy if the population do not understand and support the goals of the government, they will not work to achieve these objectives".

³⁸Ibid., p.36.

Now that there had been some discussion on the National Ideology, BG Lee stated the next step was to debate it in Parliament, invite public views and reach consensus on the key values it should contain. "We should then formulate a credo, a short formal statement of faith similar to the National Pledge, restating the key principles. This is relatively straightforward". Then the values would be systematically worked into the Singapore way of life through the schools and the homes. "We need to inculcate them through our various cultural heritages, in the different communities, and especially in the next generation. This will take many years, and be much harder".³⁹

He ended his speech by asserting:

In discussing the National Ideology, we are really pondering over the future of Singapore. What does the future hold for us? As we develop economically, will we also naturally evolve into a successful copy of a Western society? If so, we have nothing to worry about. We can just let everything happen by itself, and all will be well. Or is our fate inevitable and tragic in that as we develop, we become superficially Westernised, cast off our traditional moorings, drift into banks and shoals, and come to grief? Or will we, through deliberate effort, retain and strengthen our identity, one which is distinct from other societies, and continue to prosper, achieving political stability, freedom from want, human dignity and fulfilment for ourselves? The answer must be decided by Singaporeans ourselves. We have the right, and the responsibility, to determine our own future.⁴⁰

A stirring finish indeed, to BG Lee's attempt to

³⁹Ibid., p.37.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp.37-38.

advance the cause of a National Ideology, with some fine rhetorical questions and some well-turned phrases and images to summarise the fears and problems the Government had over Singapore's future. As should be expected, both Lee Hsien Loong's and Goh Chok Tong's speeches bear on the same concerns: "Westernisation" as identified and defined by the Government as being a "problem" and having negative effects; that if we become "superficially Westernised", we will "drift" and "come to grief" (Lee), so we should not become a "pseudo-Western society" and "drift aimlessly" into the next century (Goh). Therefore the Government, being the Government, has zeroed in on what needs to be done: "a set of principles" (Goh), "a clear set of values" (Lee) is needed to "bind our people together and guide them forward"(Goh); to "retain and strengthen our identity" to bind Singaporeans together and to determine their future (Lee). There is a future for Singaporeans, if we are proud of our "Asian civilisation" and that it is "distinct from other societies", and if we "through deliberate effort" (Lee) "preserve our Asian values" (Goh) especially when we are daily exposed to "alien influences". If we do not "abandon our roots" and "cast off our traditional moorings" (Lee) and thus reject Western "individualism" for Asian "communitarianism" and other Asian/"Confucian ethic" values like "hard work, thrift and sacrifice" (Goh), Singapore's "national competitiveness, prosperity and survival" (Goh) will be assured. The Government therefore wants

Singaporeans to "decide" or "determine" their future and their society, but has decided that "formalised values in a National Ideology" (Goh) is indeed necessary if Singapore is to continue "achieving political stability, freedom from want, human dignity and fulfilment for ourselves" (Lee), as contrasted to the usual disparaging remarks about Western "welfare-states" which are now in an economic mess, and are unable to provide employment, a decent standard of living, or even dignity to their citizens without (or unwilling to) work. This is thus a PAP attempt through a National Ideology to preserve or reinforce "important Asian values" to redress the balance, and check the advance, of what are considered the negative effects of growing Westernisation, such as excessive individualism, increasing demand for "rights", permissiveness and moral laxity, etc. Just as clearly, the four core values suggested - community over self; upholding of the family as the basic building block of society; major issues to be resolved through consensus instead of contention ; and stressing of racial and religious tolerance and harmony - reflects much of PAP ideology and beliefs, as expressed in all the years of nation-building since 1959, and especially from 1965.

Unlike the National Ideologies of Malaysia ("Rukunegara") and Indonesia ("Pancasila"), the core values proposed as the starting point of a Singapore National Ideology did not include any reference to belief in a deity. Where then is the place (if any) of God in the

National Ideology? This question was raised in a question-and-answer session at the end of BG Lee's speech. His reply was: "It is a part of life that is very hard to capture in the National Ideology. We are a secular state. Keep religion aside. Keep it out of politics altogether".⁴¹ Such an answer would not be unexpected to Singaporeans and Singapore-watchers, as it was a reiteration of constant government statements on the need to retain the secular nature of Singapore as a state. Lee went on to say that putting belief in one God in the National Ideology would lead inevitably to further difficult questions such as; which god should it be, and how about those people who do not believe in any god? He did add, however, that although it was not possible for belief in God to be included in the National Ideology immediately, there could possibly be a review of this stand in 10 years, when there might be greater consensus (he did not elaborate "consensus" on what).

According to him, the Government was not against any religion but, in fact, recognised its importance. It wanted to see "mosques, churches and temples blossom" because citizens without faith would be deprived of an "anchor" in their lives. For BG Lee to use the word "anchor" as a function of religions merely reminds one of the Singapore government view that religions are for the purpose of instilling morality or moral values in their followers to

⁴¹The Straits Times, January 12, 1989.

teach them to be good citizens. Lee also described, in his speech, Asian values as "roots" which "anchor" us and "help us to grow". Are these Asian/core values as the foundation of a National ideology, to be set in the context of a religion?

The Institute of Policy Studies was also asked by the Singapore government to conduct a study and prepare background studies with the goal (in the words of the book which was ultimately published) of identifying "those national values which can counteract the adverse effects of excessive individualism as well as unify the citizens of Singapore into a coherent nation".⁴² The writers of the articles in the book included political scientists, a sociologist and a journalist, so perhaps one can infer that they are supposed to represent the social sciences intelligentsia, here interpreting and recommending, for and on behalf of the government, some "expert" views on this area of national ideology and values. The articles included a historical perspective on nation-building in Singapore, case-studies of how their national ideologies have affected nation-building in Malaysia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, government policies used to promote nation-building, and the relevance of national values for young Singaporeans. In his introduction the editor, Jon S.T. Quah, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Vice-

⁴²Jon S.T. Quah (ed.), In Search of Singapore's National Values (Singapore: Times Academic Press/ The Institute of Policy Studies, 1990).

Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in the National University of Singapore, becomes strangely squeamish though over the use of the phrase "national ideology", preferring instead "national values", since this latter term does not have a "pejorative connotation", nor a "Marxist" overtone, like the former does. Strange indeed, since Mr. Goh Chok Tong and BG Lee Hsien Loong, (top second-generation leaders in the PAP hierarchy), obviously had no problems understanding and using the word "ideology" to express what they meant in their respective speeches. Such a display of acute (and appropriate) political consciousness and sensitivities aside, Jon Quah in his concluding chapter seeks to evaluate the four core values and ends up recommending two more.

Quah agrees that "Community over Self" as one of the values is understandable taking in account the "excessive focus" on individualism in Singapore. He gives as an example the emphasis on doing well in examinations, and hence on paper qualifications, and notes the special treatment given to the "scholar" civil servants (surely Confucian) all of which have reinforced the appeal of individualism among Singaporeans. He proposes the solution of an "attainment of an equilibrium between individual and community interests", and that "community over self" be modified to "harmony or balance between individual and community interests", as this would be "more feasible in

the short run".⁴³

Concerning the family as the basic institution, Quah notes that the various communities in Singapore - the Muslims, Tamils, Eurasians - in their discussions and submissions on the core values and the National Ideology, consider the family as indeed an important institution. "In the Singapore context, the family's important role in nation-building will be enhanced by promoting the core value of the family as the basic institution in society". However, a warning is also issued; that, given the importance of the family, care must be taken when highlighting this value to ensure that the Government is not perceived by the minority groups to be only promoting the Confucian model of the family as this will not be acceptable to Singaporeans of other races. "It is quite easy to make the mistake of stressing Confucian family values only especially when three-quarters of the population is of Chinese descent. The temptation to do so must be strenuously resisted otherwise this core value would cause a wedge not only between the Chinese and non-Chinese Singaporeans, but also among Chinese Singaporeans themselves".⁴⁴

For the core value of "solving problems by consensus, not contention", Quah seemed to have stronger and sharper

⁴³Jon S.T. Quah, "Searching For Singapore's National Values" in "In Search Of...", p.93.

⁴⁴Ibid., p.94.

comments than usual for the Government. After defining "consensus" as "shared public agreement among Singaporeans", he states that to govern by consensus assumes the government is willing to listen to the population and to consult them when formulating major public policies. He notes the change in PAP leadership style from a paternalistic one (1959-84) to a consultative style (after 1984) as conducive for the promotion of this particular core value. He warns the leaders however, that they "should realise that one consequence of governing by consensus is that it requires time and that they would not be able to formulate and implement public policies as swiftly as they had done so before".⁴⁵

He stresses also that this core value should not undermine the role and place of opposition parties in Singapore.

Indeed, in a democratic political system, opposition parties play a valuable role when they are constructive in their criticism of government policies and when they provide a credible alternative to the incumbent government. At the same time, however, the government must not ignore or neglect the demands made by various groups and their adverse reactions to public policies. Rather, the government should assess objectively whether such demands are legitimate or not, and also ascertain the reasons for the negative responses to its policies.⁴⁶

Remarks like those above would have been regarded as heretical not too long ago, with the implication that the

⁴⁵Ibid., p.95.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp.95-96.

government's "pragmatism" may not have been "practical" after all, or that the regard for strict control or order over society may not be that good for the public order too. Quah goes on to say that the government should take care to ensure that it does not silence constructive dissent when it governs by consensus, for if that happens, Singaporeans will perceive the promotion of this core value as an attempt to perpetuate PAP rule.

Quah makes two final recommendations to the Government: firstly, to govern by consensus and not contention, it has to consult Singaporeans when it wishes to formulate important policies. Singaporeans, on the other hand, should come forward and provide honest feedback on government policies as well as suggestions for improving such policies; they should make full use of such opportunities given to them in this consultative process. Secondly, the government must take the exercise of consulting the people seriously. "It must not be perceived by Singaporeans merely to be paying lip service to consultation and dismissing feedback provided especially if such feedback is negative". Survey findings do indicate that the majority of the respondents want to be consulted by the government before policies are made but their perception is that the government has not done so. "If there is overwhelming public opposition or resistance to a new policy, the PAP leaders should attempt to ascertain the reasons for such dissatisfaction, and either modify its

contents or re-examine the need for such a policy in the first place".⁴⁷ A radical suggestion indeed, considering the PAP's long-standing aversion to adjusting or changing any policy it has deemed right in the running of the nation.

As for "Racial and Religious Tolerance and Harmony", Quah's conclusion is that understanding, tolerance and harmony between the different races and religions in Singapore is a *sine qua non* for its survival as a nation. Indeed, according to Quah, Singapore's rapid economic growth after her independence has been the result of its political stability, which in turn can be attributed to the absence of racial or religious conflict during the last 20 years. The White Paper on Maintenance of Religious Harmony (which was passed by Parliament as a Bill on November 9, 1990) is quoted as giving two vital conditions to be observed to maintain harmony: "firstly, followers of the different religions must exercise moderation and tolerance, and do nothing to cause religious enmity or hatred. Secondly, religion and politics must be kept rigorously separated". To Quah then, the inclusion of this core value recognises the fragility of the racial and religious harmony in Singapore and seeks to increase further tolerance and understanding. It should be noted that if indeed there had been an "absence of racial or religious conflict", it was because the PAP government was not

⁴⁷Ibid., p.96.

hesitant in acting against religious groups which threatened (in the government's eyes) to cause such conflict. Examples and details will be given in Section B of Chapter IV.

Quah, on behalf of his Study Group, then proposes two additional national values to supplement the aforementioned four core values: honest government and compassion for the less fortunate.

For "honest government", Quah gives a short summary of the steps and incentives taken by the PAP over the years to ensure a corruption-free government. His reason then for suggesting this new value is to maintain the tradition of clean and honest government by highlighting it as one of Singapore's national values, and to preserve this tradition as far as possible. Singaporeans should realise that it is in their best interests to maintain this tradition, because they cannot afford to lower their standards and accept a dishonest or corrupt government. This does not necessarily mean that the PAP government is the only government that is fit to rule in Singapore - only that Singaporeans deserve an honest government.⁴⁸

In speaking of "Compassion for the Less Fortunate", two groups of Singaporeans are referred to: those who are disabled, and destitute families. This sixth "national value of compassion" for the less fortunate is important, Quah feels, because it encourages the more fortunate

⁴⁸Ibid., p.101.

Singaporeans to be more considerate and to think of their counterparts who are less well off. At the same time, the disabled and destitute Singaporeans will thus not feel neglected or alienated since their feelings and needs are also being taken into account by their more fortunate fellow citizens. Quah hastens to add though, that in suggesting this new core value, his Study Group is not recommending that Singapore should become a "welfare state" (anathema to the PAP), and also that any assistance extended to the "less fortunate" should be done in such a manner that they can help themselves, and without eroding their will to work or undermining their self-respect.⁴⁹

So from the original four core values first mentioned by the President at the opening of Parliament in January 1989, the Institute of Policy Studies after having been asked by the government to do so, now concluded their study with a recommendation of six core values to be adopted by the government as national values for all Singaporeans. In descending order of importance, they were:

1. Enhancing racial and religious understanding, tolerance and harmony.
2. Preserving and maintaining the tradition of honest government.
3. Harmonizing individual interests with the interests of the community at large.
4. Upholding the family as a basic institution of society.

⁴⁹Ibid., p.102.

5. Showing compassion for the less fortunate in society.
6. Resolving major issues through consensus as far as possible.

The Committee on Shared Values, of which Deputy Prime Minister Brigadier-General Lee Hsien Loong was the Chairman, advanced the discussion on these core values further when it released a White Paper on January 6, 1991. Again, there were changes in the number and form of the Shared Values: "regard and community support for the individual" was an addition to the four core values first suggested, and another change was the extension of "society above self" to include "nation before community". Reactions from 22 academics, politicians, religious leaders and parents were garnered, and the summing up was that there was general support for the core values, but with some reservations on individual values.⁵⁰ (We can however also ask whether these 22 respondents do actually represent the attitudes of the citizenry at large). While there was welcome for the new value of regard and community support for the individual, a few from the 22 feared that this might lead to the Government passing the responsibility of looking after the poor and aged to the citizens. The Government has a role too, and should not "pass the buck to the community". The value of consensus instead of contention raised the most controversy among the respondents. There were fears that an irresponsible

⁵⁰The Straits Times, January 9, 1991.

Government might use this to muzzle the Opposition in the future. An opposition MP, Chiam See Tong, called for this value to be dropped, as he felt it would make Singaporeans "stop thinking". The Government, he said, was trying to "contain the emerging trend among Singaporeans to speak out". Chiam also felt that the value of family as the basic unit of society was a way to "sneak in Confucianism". Others wanted religious and political values to be included. All interviewed, however, were against legislating values, feeling it would be better for the values to be imparted through schools, homes, religious centres and the media.

On January 14 and 15, 1991 Members of Parliament debated the White Paper. A record 31 MPs spoke on the issue, but most of them just took at face value the reasons for having the values as stated in the White Paper, surging forward instead to focus on the pros and cons of each value and how they could be reworded or modified. It was left to the two Opposition MPs to argue that the Government had no moral right to propose the five Shared Values as many of its policies were not consistent with those values. Mr. Chiam See Tong stated that unless the Government practised what it preached in its policies on the family, race and support for the individual, its "sanctimonious, pious talk would sound hollow". Both he and Lee Siew Choh cited a string of policies which they argued showed the Government's "hypocrisy" when it advocated the Shared

Values. For "nation above community, society above self", Chiam said that many felt the Government was mercenary and ran the country on commercial lines. Thus, privatisation of government monopolies like Telecom and the Public Utilities Board would only benefit wealthy individuals at the expense of the community. As for "the family as the basic unit in society", both Chiam and Lee argued that the Government's immigration policy on Singaporeans who marry foreigners had broken up many families in Singapore. In terms of "regard and community support for the individual", Chiam said the Government was abrogating its duty to provide a measure of welfare for those in need. He was not advocating widespread welfarism, but rather welfare programmes for the most needy like the destitute, the aged sick and those unable to work. What, he asked, had become of the old PAP idealism? Both the Opposition MPs felt that "racial and religious harmony" was a way of life in Singapore, but Chiam argued that Government policies such as having separate racial months, the Speak Mandarin Campaign and calls for each racial group to solve its own community's problems had actually heightened racial awareness.

Further changes were made to the Shared Values in response to the comments and criticisms made during the debate. The final list of the Shared Values is as follows, with appropriate comments (and reasons for inclusion) from the White Paper:

1. Nation before community and society above self: The

White Paper says that putting the interests of society ahead of the individual's has been a major factor in Singapore's success. The principle also applies when weighing the interests of sub-groups against that of the nation as a whole.

2. Family as the basic unit of society: The family is regarded as the best environment for children to grow and for the elderly to be looked after. The White Paper reiterates that Singaporeans must not "uncritically" adopt the "alternative lifestyles" seen in western developed countries, such as casual sexual relationships and single parenthood.

3. Community support and respect for the individual (revised from "regard and community support for the individual"): While stressing the value of community above self, the Government apparently now recognises that the individual has rights which should be respected and not to be lightly encroached upon. The White Paper had said that the Shared values seek to balance the community with the individual, not promote one to the exclusion of the other.

4. Consensus not conflict (revised from "consensus instead of contention"): This means accomodating different views of the way society should develop, and forming a consensus on particular courses of action which have majority but not unanimous support, in order to bring as many people on board as possible. The White Paper notes that this value complements the idea of putting society above self.

5. Racial and religious harmony: Stressed by the Government as fundamental to the wellbeing of Singapore. Unless the different communities can live in harmony together, neither the majority Chinese community nor any of the other groups will be able to prosper as they have done, so states the White Paper.

All fine and good, but just how these Shared Values are to be promoted or implemented as a National Ideology remains uncertain, other than the oft-mentioned avenues of school and family. Another pertinent question would be how the implementation of these values actually affects the lives of Singaporeans. What kind of sacrifices does the Government expect Singaporeans to have to make to their personal choices in abiding by these Shared Values? What real-life examples could be given to explain to the people how the Values would affect them? In other words, unless the Values were legislated - which would mean imposing the values on the people instead of gaining their voluntary acceptance and support - some way still had to be found to enshrine these values so that they do become basic tenets in the value system of Singaporeans. Member of Parliament Dr. Arthur Beng had the opinion that having Shared Values meant putting them in practice, and the Government had an important role in this (the implication being that the Government must be serious about making the Shared values or National Ideology work). He said: "We must now begin to question Government policies not only in economic terms,

but examine whether they conform with the Shared Values". Furthermore, all present and future major policies must "pass the test of not contradicting our Shared Values", for only then would the Values be meaningful.⁵¹ This indeed sounds like a positive version of what Opposition MP Chiam See Tong had said to the Government on the same subject: practice what you preach!

For all the effort, energy and expense incurred by the Government in spelling out and promoting these core values/shared values/ national ideology (a process which began systematically in October 1988), with the stated intention of countering "negative" Western values and to "evolve and anchor a Singaporean identity" (Introduction of the White Paper on Shared Values), the general perception was that the proposed Shared Values were not something which got one all excited. This was the view expressed by another PAP Member of Parliament, Chng Hee Kok, who added that he and other Singaporeans were "not turned on by them"! As he saw it, there was nothing wrong in the substance or essence of the Values. Rather, there appeared to be a lack of a sense of urgency, both inside and outside Parliament, about the need for a set of Shared Values now. He noted that the White Paper "has little or no immediate impact on Singaporeans".⁵² One could also add that Singaporeans may well be sceptical of the whole idea of

⁵¹The Straits Times, January 16, 1991.

⁵²Ibid.

Shared Values in the first place.

If that is so, the Government must be wondering why. Is it because Singaporeans at large (other than the 22 who were interviewed) do not take seriously, or are as alarmed as the PAP seemed to be about growing Western influence? Do they still need to be convinced of the importance of such values, the existence of which, according to their leaders, is an extremely important prerequisite for (continued) nation-building? Or is the feeling that of the Government having its own agenda for pushing this National Ideology-Shared Values concept other than that stated in the White Paper, with the additional apprehension that the Government may also drop all of this in the name of "pragmatic change", or to push another perceived "important" issue?

The fact remains that after the Shared Values were adopted in Parliament, the agenda seemed to have been to quietly leave them to one side, or let them be. No overt consistent efforts in bringing them to the forefront of the Singaporean consciousness seemed to have been done, although the White Paper, in section 54, affirmed that "practical steps" need to be taken "to weave them into our way of life, and inculcate them in Singaporeans, especially the younger citizens, through our various cultural heritages. This will take many years". The years since have seen an emphasis on "Asian values", depending on how they are defined, and with countries like South Korea, Taiwan or Japan being cited as examples where the strong presence

of "Asian values" have helped in their economic success. And for Singapore, that is always the bottom line - the survival of Singapore depends on its economic success.

Hence the move to inculcate the Shared Values into Singapore society may indeed be going on, albeit in a quieter, less obvious manner. An example of this may be the Minister for Information and the Arts, Brigadier-General George Yeo, commenting on the Duchess of York, and the Woody Allen "scandals", and stating that Singapore must not go the way of Western societies where such public figures as the two already mentioned could "flout standards of morality openly". He said that these were examples of what happened when society no longer held "certain standards".⁵³ He added that Singaporeans should be reassured by the findings of the survey on moral values recently published which showed that Singaporeans still upheld family values. "It means that the basic building block of our society is still intact". That survey reported that Singaporeans still held conservative views on sex and marriage, and that they "voice a firm 'no' to liberal values".⁵⁴ So, as expected, BG Yeo called for discrimination in what Singaporeans picked up from East and West, and also stressed the need for inter-racial harmony and unity between people and government. One could say then that most of the Shared Values were touched on and reaffirmed in his speech.

⁵³The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, August 29, 1992.

⁵⁴The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, August 8, 1992.

A recent reminder that the Shared Values have not gone away but are being quietly stressed and implemented came in an article which was entitled "Greed threatens shared values like society above self".⁵⁵ The writer was reacting against a prominent businessman Robert Ng for eulogising greed when he spoke to some students in a pre-university seminar.

The government is thus being patient in waiting for these Values to be accepted (with periodic examples) by the people, and thus to become part and parcel of the Singapore Way of Life, whether this be understood (as we will propose) as a civil religion, and also as an ideology helping Singapore continue its economic progress, so much a part of, and justification for its "nation-building".

⁵⁵Ng Wei Joo, The Sunday Times, July 11, 1993.

CHAPTER III

A SINGAPOREAN CIVIL RELIGION?

The last chapter, in dealing with Singapore as a society and in terms of 'nation-building', was also in a sense dealing with fundamental questions about what 'society' is. How is society possible? What makes it possible? What enables separate members or citizens or persons to come together into a larger whole, the identifiable entity called 'society'? Society is more than the sum of persons who just happen to be together at a certain time in a certain place or even in a certain culture. There are also such concepts as "national values" or social norms and traditions which do operate on, and do have a force felt by the individual in a society. Singapore has a norm against littering- which includes tapping ash from a cigarette onto the pavement- and so if you are a careless smoker with an excitable finger, you will be punished whether or not you agree with the norm of non-littering. The Michael Fay case reveals clearly the Singaporean norm of corporal punishment for vandalism, whether you agree or not on the relative seriousness of the act of spray-painting cars, or stealing road signs as souvenirs. The question of society is therefore also concerned with the relationship between what are held to be common or national values and the production and maintenance of social order.

What, then, is the kind of unity existing in society which gives it this powerful quality? How is the individual connected to this larger society? And how does the society gain the commitment and cooperation of its members? Is it indeed so, as Emile Durkheim believed, that a set of common values is mandatory for a society's survival? What is the role of religion? In many societies, a traditional religion serves the purpose of providing a sense of unity and common meaning, and may even serve as a source of national unity if it is held by the majority of the population. However, in a "pluralistic" or religiously heterogeneous society, it would be difficult indeed for one particular religious group to serve such a function. The possibility is real that religious groups may instead become sources of civil conflict rather than unity or harmony. In such a situation, something else must serve as a basis for social cohesion or consensus and for evaluating and defining the value and meaningfulness of national activity. A new meaning system may now be needed, which may then become sacralized and serve as a form of religiosity. The needs of society being a basis of religion? Religion representing a sanctification of society? In beginning to talk of integration theories, and concepts of social cohesion and stability, and of a religious dimension in all cultures, we must now turn to Emile Durkheim, in whose works the theme of social cohesion is central.

Durkheim

Durkheim argued in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life that the origin of all religion lies in the ascription of 'sacredness' to the human community: family, clan, tribe, city, and state, in that order. It is the social bond itself that is celebrated in the most primitive religions - external, supernatural gods are not to be found. Durkheim had observed that a sense of 'force' was central to primitive religions, and he stressed that this religious force was not an illusion. The symbols being used to represent this force may be imperfect, but the force being experienced by the people is real - and Durkheim calls it **society**. He goes on to say that it is the social bond, in the form of the cult and the church, that remains the real basis of faith and observance even in the 'higher', 'revealed' religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Religion is thus the expression of social forces and social ideals, and wherever there is social cohesion, it is expressed religiously. It is a system of shared meanings by which individuals represent to themselves their society and their relations to that society. To take part in religious ritual is therefore to experience the transcendent force of society itself. Religions would tend to weaken when their religious rituals or visible communal rites begin to weaken or fade too, and when religion itself is declared to be just a matter of individual faith. Durkheim also wrote that there is virtually no limit to what may be regarded by a

given cult as sacred, i.e. as belonging to a different sphere from what is utilitarian or secular. Good and evil are alike expressions of the sacred. Hence his well-known definition of religion: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them."¹ Moving from primitive religions to world and civil religions, Durkheim asserted that all societies need regular events to reaffirm their shared meanings and central ideas. Since these shared beliefs and symbols express the highest values of that society (and are thus considered sacred), the collective sharing of these values will remind members in that society of what they hold in common, as such providing for the stability, order, and integration of the society as a whole. Periodic collective rites ("reunions, assemblies and meetings"), during which the shared values are celebrated and reaffirmed, constitute the specific structures through which these states of cohesion and integration are affirmed and sustained. However, Durkheim also states:

...hence come ceremonies which do not differ from regular religious ceremonies, either in their object, the results which they produce, or the processes employed to attain these results. What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principal dates of

¹Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1976), p.47.

the life of Christ, or of Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt or the promulgation of the decalogue, and a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life?²

Durkheim may thus be implying that in modern nations (like France, his own country), religious representations and rituals may comprise the civic religion of the national collectivity. Such national religions are called or named "civil religions".

B. The Civil Religion Hypothesis

Before we go on to definitions offered for this concept, perhaps a brief 'history' (if such a word can be used) should be offered. The term "civil religion" was actually coined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his **Social Contract** (1762). However the traits or characteristics commonly associated with it appear far back in history. The ancient Greek and Roman city-states had civil religions. (In fact, "civil religion" is quite clearly an outgrowth of what Augustine called "civil theology" to characterize the religion of pre-Christian Rome). The family and its functions, the giving of devotion to ancestors - such may have formed the core of the Greeks' and Romans' private religion, but the city-state was the heart of the public religion, and as such, there were appointed seasonal and other festivals, rites and creeds, all honouring the great events of the city's past. So each Greek polis had its own

²Ibid., p.427.

gods, dogmas, and worship. The Roman emperor had dual roles: he was the chief priest in the state cult as well as an object of worship. The public religious cult alone was an obligatory civic duty. As Jurgen Moltmann puts it, "It was therefore, completely irrelevant whether one refused to worship the gods of the state because one was atheist or whether one refused to worship them because one worshipped other gods. Atheism meant only one thing: public refusal to participate in the civic cult, cultic impiety against the gods of the state."³ Civil religions also flourished in the Middle ages and during the Renaissance in western Europe. Major cities held festivals and yearly ceremonies in what was basically a worshipful attitude for the city itself.

It has been suggested that the destructive conflicts between European Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, followed by the attack on revealed religion of any kind in the Enlightenment, led to the creation of a vacuum of belief among many in western Europe. Indeed, part of the reason for Rousseau to advocate civil religion was to provide a substitute belief system for those whose faiths had been destroyed by the forces of the Enlightenment. The traditional Christian conception of God was not adequate then. Also unsuccessful were attempts to make a deistic God, or a God of nature or progress take the Christian God's place. What did prove effective though

³Jurgen Moltmann, "The Cross and Civil Religion" in Religion and Political Society, Moltmann, et al. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p.23.

was the concept of patrie from French philosophy, which referred to the political state as one that was paternal towards its citizens, and was more than an instrument of warfare and taxation the state had seemed to be for so many centuries.

Rousseau had patrie in mind when he wrote his **Social Contract**. Book IV, Chapter VIII was titled "The Civil Religion". In it Rousseau expressed the belief that a religious need lies in everyone, and believing also that all existing religions, especially Christianity, were inadequate in the ideal state, he proposed a systematic civil religion "of which the Sovereign would fix the articles." Such articles would not exactly be "religious dogmas but as social sentiments without which a person cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject." His proposed civil religion had serious sanctions included - banishment and even death for those who accepted and then flouted these articles of belief. Such a person would be "an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing, at need, his life to his duty."⁴ One could say then that authority is the crux of the matter - authority to set legal boundaries and invoke transcendental sanctions. Rousseau's solution to these twin problems is civil religion: it is religious because it is necessary that citizens be willing to love their duties,

⁴Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract and Discourses (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1973), p.307.

and it is civil because its sentiments are those of sociability, lacking which a person cannot be a good and faithful citizen. Rousseau's civil religion is also something that could deal with religious pluralism and at the same time cement people's loyalty to civil society, thus ensuring social peace. Therefore,

The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent, and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws: these are its positive dogmas. Its negative dogmas I confine to one, intolerance...⁵

Some of Rousseau's other points can be summarised thus: civil religion (1) is codified in a single country, (2) gives it its gods, (3) gives it its own tutelary patrons, (4) has its dogmas, rites, external cult prescribed by law, (5) outside the nation, all the world is foreign and barbarous.

The advantages of civil religion are that it (1) unites the divine cult with love of the laws, (2) makes the country the object of the citizens' adoration - it teaches them that service done to the State is service done to its "tutelary God", (3) is a form of theocracy - "no pontiff save the prince", and (4) stresses that to die for one's country is martyrdom; to violate its laws is impiety.

The disadvantages of civil religion are that it (1) is

⁵Ibid., pp.307-308.

founded on lies and error, deceives men, makes them credulous and superstitious, and drowns true religion in empty ceremonial, (2) becomes tyrannous and exclusive - makes a people intolerant. It regards as a sacred act the killing of anyone who does not believe in its gods, (3) places such a people in a natural state of war with all others so that its security is deeply endangered.

One is left after all this with the impression that civil religions, in Rousseau's meaning of the term, are probably quite rare in the world today, not types that are routinely developed! According to Phillip Hammond, Rousseau's "civil religion was not to be just another religion; its purpose was precisely to harmonize religion and politics."⁶ Civil religion was to be an ideology at once transcendent but focused on the nation-state. Nationalisms are plentiful indeed today, but how many truly reflect a transcendent or "ultimate" quality?

(i) Some Definitions

It will be proposed later that there was an attempt by the government in Singapore to construct a civil religion (including in part, nationalism) for a specific purpose. For now, however, we need to clarify the term "Civil Religion". There is no denying that "Civil Religion" is indeed a vague and imprecise, even controversial concept, happily used by sociologists and theologians to cover

⁶Phillip E. Hammond, "The Conditions for Civil Religion: A Comparison of the United States and Mexico" in Varieties of Civil Religion, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), p.42.

several different understandings. Be that as it may, some general definitions may be attempted, apart from what has already been said concerning Rousseau's use of the term.

Civil religion has also been called civic, public, or even political religion. It refers to the general and widespread acceptance by a people of a structure of religious-political characteristics linked with their nation's history and perceived destiny. There is also a religious or quasi-religious regard for certain values and traditions found constantly in the history of the nation. Such regard is usually shown by special festivals, rituals, creeds or dogmas that honour the great persons and events of the nation's past. "Civil religion is the expression of the cohesion of the nation. It transcends denominational, ethnic, and religious boundaries. The civil religion has its own collective representations, by which the nation represents an ideal of itself to its members. It has its own rituals, by which members commemorate significant national events and renew their commitment to their society."⁷ By such a "renewal" of "commitment", there is thus a looking forward too. Civil religion also serves to relate a people's society to the realm of ultimate meaning ("destiny"). It thus also enables the self-interpretation of the society, and functions as a "social cement", as the integrating symbolism of a nation. To use Will Herberg's

⁷Meredith B. McGuire, Religion: The Social Context, second edition, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987), p.159.

term, it is the "operative religion" of a society, and is the system of rituals, symbols, values, norms, and allegiances that function in the ongoing life of the community and provide it with "an overarching sense of unity" that rises above all internal conflicts and differences.

One apparent distinctive mark about civil religion then is that it has reference to power within the state yet transcends that power by focusing on ultimate conditions. As Herbert Richardson puts it, "one of the functions of civil religion is to legitimate and control the use of political power in a society."⁸ Theoretically then, civil religion gives both the justification for power and a basis for criticizing those who exercise power (cf. "priestly/prophetic" forms). Also, "civil" religion must in some sense be independent of the church as such or it will merely be an ecclesiastical legitimization of the state, and it must be genuinely a "religion" - be independent of the ruling regime - or it will be just secular nationalism.

To sum up then, "civil religion is the set of beliefs, rites, and symbols that sacralize the values of the society and place the nation in the context of an ultimate system of meaning...Socially, civil religion serves to define the national purposes in transcendent terms and acts as an

⁸Herbert Richardson, "Civil Religion in Theological Perspective" in American Civil Religion, eds. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p.163.

expression of national cohesion. In short, it offers a nondenominational theodicy for the nation."⁹

(ii) American Civil Religion

If we are looking for examples of civil religion in the world today, we have to consider the case of American Civil Religion. After all, it was Robert Bellah's paper "Civil Religion in America" which was the catalyst that propelled civil religion as a topic into the centre of scholarly attention. Heated debates went on in America as to the nature of this "public faith", and whether in fact it even was a valid concept.

In his paper, Bellah asserted, "...few have realised that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America...this religion - or perhaps better, this religious dimension - has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religion does."¹⁰ Bellah points out that the principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association, but it has also the effect at the same time of clearly separating the religious sphere (considered to be essentially private) from the political one. But if there

⁹Keith A. Roberts, Religion in Sociological Perspective, Second edition, (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), p.342.

¹⁰Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" in Daedalus, Winter 1967, (Boston, Massachusetts), p.1.

is such a separation, how is a President justified in using the word "God" at all in his inaugural address? Bellah says, "The answer is that the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension."Matters dealing with one's personal religious belief or worship may indeed be considered strictly private, but there are still "certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share." These have had a crucial role in developing American institutions, "and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion."¹¹ This religious dimension is not to be equated with Christianity, however, although much may be selectively derived from it.¹² Bellah notes that American Presidents such as Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and others mention "God" but not "Christ".So the collection of "beliefs, symbols, and rituals" shared much in connection with Christianity, but was neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian. Also, according to Bellah, there was an implicit yet clear division of function between the civil religion and Christianity. "Under the doctrine of religious liberty, an exceptionally wide sphere of personal piety and voluntary social action

¹¹Ibid., pp.3-4.

¹²Ibid., p.7.

was left to the churches. But the churches were neither to control the state nor to be controlled by it."¹³ Furthermore, the religious dimension in political life "not only provides a grounding for the rights of man which makes any form of political absolutism illegitimate, it also provides a transcendent goal for the political process."¹⁴ Here, Bellah was apparently inspired by John F. Kennedy's final words in his inaugural address on January 20, 1961: "here on earth God's work must truly be our own." In another article, in pointing to the Declaration of Independence's reference to the sovereignty of God over political society, he affirms, "The existence of this highest level religious symbolism in the political life of the republic justifies the assertion that there is a civil religion in America."¹⁵

Bellah has consistently affirmed that there is a constant and persistent thrust within American civil religion which proposes that civil power stands under the sovereignty of God and that the nation must judge its own acts in the light of divine righteousness. American civil religion is America's attempt to bring its own life under a higher ideal, and it functions to make "any form of political absolutism illegitimate." Bellah therefore

¹³Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴Ibid., p.4.

¹⁵Robert N. Bellah, "Religion and the Legitimation of the American Republic" in Varieties of Civil Religion, op.cit., p.11.

realises too that American civil religion can be idolatrous. This occurs when the gap between the nation and its ideals are closed, so that the all-important dimension of transcendence is lost, and America falls into self-congratulation or smugness. One might say then that the sense of covenant has collapsed. "Precisely from the point of view of republicanism civil religion is indispensable. A republic as an active political community of participating citizens must have a purpose and a set of values...A republic must attempt to be ethical in a positive sense and to elicit the ethical commitment of its citizens. For this reason it inevitably pushes toward the symbolization of an ultimate order of existence in which republican values and virtues make sense."¹⁶ And again, "...in describing the classical notion of a republic, there is a necessity in such a regime not only for asserting high ethical and spiritual commitments but also for molding, socializing, and educating the citizens into those ethical and spiritual beliefs so they are internalized as republican virtue."¹⁷

In passing, we can note one response to Bellah's endorsement of "republican virtue" or core American values. Michael Hughey has pointed out that Bellah's paper was published in 1967, against a background of social upheaval in America. Various attacks on then-orthodox morals,

¹⁶Ibid., p.12.

¹⁷Ibid., p.16.

values, and understandings, Hughey suggests, may have made Bellah self-consciously aware of his own affinities for them. "Thus conceived, Bellah's initial expression of American civil religion may be regarded as a defensive and personal reaction to attacks on traditional, Protestant, small town civic values..."¹⁸ "Civil Religion in America" thus represented an affirmation of these values at the exact moment of their general demise. According to Hughey then, Bellah detached the old middle-class Protestant values from their existence in a historical time and place and from the institutions that sustained them, and fashioned them into a "higher" and "transcendent" order of value and meaning. "These values were then projected onto American society as a whole and given doctrinal expression as American civil religion. In this sense, American civil religion represents an intellectually sublimated and extended version of the small town Protestant civic morality which Bellah shares."¹⁹

Besides Bellah's, there are also several interpretations of American civil religion. Brief mention will now be made of some other scholars. Sydney Mead is a historian who calls his understanding of American civil religion, "religion of the Republic". America is indeed "The Nation with the Soul of a Church". His phrase

¹⁸Michael W. Hughey, Civil Religion and Moral Order, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), p.164.

¹⁹Ibid.

"religion of the republic" suggests that the civil religion is indebted to the American Enlightenment and the revolutionary period. It is the Enlightenment faith that provides the nation with its "synergistic" religious cosmopolitanism; the universal religion with its prophetic and transcendent spirituality is such a "faith". The republican beliefs in popular sovereignty and representative government, and the deist beliefs in the existence of God, creation, laws of nature, providence, immortality, and judgement are the fundamentals of the "religion of the Republic".²⁰ Such beliefs unite and transcend the separate sects and ethnic groups. It is the belief system of the religion of the republic - the "universality inherent in its spiritual core" - that makes it superior to the divisive creeds of the denominations. Mead's civil religion can thus be called "an American faith".

To Will Herberg, civil religion is "...the operative religion of a society, the system of norms, values, and allegiances actually functioning as such in the ongoing social life of the community."²¹ The word "community" is important here, because Herberg's version of civil religion can be called a "folk" version - he was interested in the views of average Americans. He claimed that Protestants,

²⁰Sydney E. Mead, "The 'Nation with the Soul of a Church' " in American Civil Religion, op.cit., pp.59-63.

²¹Will Herberg, "America's Civil Religion: What It Is and Whence It Comes" in American Civil Religion, op.cit., pp.76-77.

Catholics, and Jews in America were all worshipping the American way of Life. It was the central sacred system of beliefs, and whether or not this set of beliefs was accompanied by a "God" it appeared to be the operating centre of values and hence the central, "common religion" of America, providing Americans with an "overarching sense of unity". The American Way of Life is the civil religion of Americans. It is compounded of "the two great religious movements that molded America - the Puritan way, secularized; and the Revivalist way, secularized."²² In other words then, secularized Protestantism.

Martin E. Marty has pointed out that civil religion can be either prophetic or priestly in style. He proposes that there are two kinds of civil religion, one that sees an objective, transcendent deity as the reference point for the social process ("the nation under God") - in his own words, "Somehow a transcendent deity is seen as the pusher or puller of the social process", and the other which stresses national self-transcendence. This kind "does not see people, left to themselves, automatically given to self-worship."²³ Within these are the two approaches - the "priestly" which is celebrative, affirmative, and culture-building by affirming the greatness of the nation, its achievements and superiority. Thus it does provide comfort

²²Ibid., p.83.

²³Martin E. Marty, "Two Kinds of Two Kinds of Civil Religion" in American Civil Religion, op.cit., p.144.

and stability, often by legitimating and sacralizing the present system. The "Prophetic" is dialectical but tends towards the judgmental - it tends to challenge the status quo and call the faithful to change behaviours in accord with ethical concerns. It thus directs the nation's attention to its offenses, compared to the ideals for which it stands.

As a summary then, we can say that American civil religion is expressed through myths (America as the "promised land"), rituals, national holidays (the ceremonial rituals that occur on such "holy days" as Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and presidential inauguration days), visitations to national "shrines" such as the Washington and Lincoln Memorials in Washington, D.C., the Capitol building, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, war cemeteries, and the birthplaces or burial sites of American presidents, and sacred treatment of national symbols, most particularly the American flag. All these in one way or another express central American values and inspire a feeling of unity and even a sense of transcendence - that there is indeed a greater purpose for the citizen and the nation. After all, the national motto does state, "In God We Trust!"

Are there other examples of civil religion in the world, either existing or being developed? In Britain, Robert Boccock believes that the Royal Family is a central

component of the civil religion there and forms a focus for ritual activity and the revitalisation of loyalty to the nation-state (although with all that has been happening to, or has been revealed, about the Royal Family recently, many might wonder what kind of "focus" is being offered). Bocock also feels that Britain's civil religion can be seen as expressing in its teachings, in its values, in its social practices and in its organisations (such as the Church of England or of Scotland) a form of patriarchal ideology.²⁴

Even today in Japan there may be a civil religion involving a mixture (or fusion) of divinity, society and the individual.

In Malaysia, the civil religion there serves to overcome any divisiveness of exclusive loyalty which the different races give to their own particular religious communities. The King must be a Malay and a Muslim, according to the constitution. However, in order to promote a unified identity ("Malaysian") among all the races in the whole nation, which includes large minorities of Chinese, Indians, Europeans, etc., and are thus non-Muslim, the government promotes civil rituals and campaigns stressing goodwill among each other, solidarity among all in the nation, and tries to sacralize the ideals of interethnic cooperation ("gotong royong") and just representation of all groups in the pluralistic society. Malaysia has a

²⁴Robert Bocock, "Religion in Modern Britain" in Religion and Ideology, eds. Robert Bocock and Kenneth Thompson, (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1985), pp.207-233.

creed; a set of national values called the Rukunegara which all Malaysian citizens are to ascribe to. (Indonesia, with a "secular" constitution despite an overwhelming Muslim population, has a similar creed/national values called Pancasila).

The conflict in Northern Ireland could perhaps be understood as the result of two mutually exclusive civil religions: one "Protestant" ("Orangeism") and the other "Catholic" ("Republicanism"). The civil religions themselves seem to have become separate religions, with dynamics of their own.

The rise of the "far-right" in much of Europe appears conducive to a resurgence of nationalisms mixed with racism and fascism. A recent article talked about the candle-lit processions against racism in Germany, and the fact that millions are prepared to take to the streets to demonstrate against the murder of "foreigners". The writer comments that the Germans themselves are still "the astonished witnesses to the birth of a new 'civic' religion - one which derives its strength from the methods and symbols of traditional religion; one which turns a collective and unifying eye on contemporary social realities and on Germany's history."²⁵ This religion may come without God, but it does have the power to move. The writer is gloomy about it though, "It appeals in the short term to our sense

²⁵Micha Brumlik, "Darkest Light", The Guardian, section two, February 5, 1993, p.15.

of community, but without bringing people closer together. It paints a new world view without actually increasing our understanding of it."²⁶

As stated earlier, civil religion has also been termed civic, public, or political religion; it acts as an expression of national cohesion, and serves to define the purpose of a nation in transcendent terms. As such, it may well be that writers will continue to use the concept of civil religion to discuss, analyse or evaluate the various forms of nationalism or national sentiment being expressed in Europe and elsewhere. For now, we return to Singapore to see if a civil religion is being developed there.

C. The Singapore Experiment: Confucianism, National Ideology and Civil Religion.

Was there an attempt to construct a "civil religion" in Singapore? Any attempt to answer that question would necessarily have to take into account the political and cultural backdrop, and this brings into focus again the formulation of "shared values" and a national ideology, and the influence of Confucianism on the whole process.

The idea of having a national ideology is, of course, not new in South-East Asia. Malaysia and Indonesia have

²⁶Ibid.

their own examples.²⁷ These two national examples were formulated at times of social and political crises: Malaysia's "Rukunegara" ("pillars of the state") was formally introduced in 1969, not long after the racial riots following (Chinese) opposition party gains in the national elections. It "reflects the essence of the Malaysian Constitution" and "is aimed at further safeguarding the substance of the Malayan/Malaysian Constitution"²⁸ which enshrines Malay dominance in politics and culture, including the position of the Malay rulers, language and religion (Islam). Indonesia's national ideology is the "Pancasila" ("five principles") formulated in 1945, when the country was shaking herself free from her Japanese occupiers and also seeking independence from the Dutch, which wanted to restore the colonial order. Singapore's attempt at a national ideology seems also to have emerged at a time of political and social transition and change.

This was not sudden. In arguing for a national ideology, the ruling People's Action Party has pointed to, and has seen in Confucianism a necessary moral core to the society. The government, since the early 1980's, and further emphasized since 1988, has thus tried to foster Confucian values within the population. As Chapter II has

²⁷See Leo Suryadinata, "National Ideology and Nation-Building in Multi-Ethnic States: Lessons from Other Countries" in Quah, op.cit., pp.24-44.

²⁸Ibid., pp.35, 30.

shown, Confucianism is part of the PAP ideology, but more than that, it should also be remembered that the population of Singapore is 77% Chinese. "For the Chinese in general, cultural values are primarily moral in nature; Confucian values are what basically shape the Chinese mind".²⁹ In other words, whether they realise it or not, Singaporeans already exist in a quasi-Confucian society. And any "promotion of Confucianism does not aim at introducing 'new values' to Singaporeans. Confucian values both relevant and not so relevant are already exerting their influences upon Singaporeans".³⁰ As one Confucian scholar commented on Singapore:

I found this state to be well-governed, orderly and modernized. Furthermore, three-quarters of the population, as well as a majority of the leadership, are actually putting Confucianism into action (emphasis mine). The general public, from the leadership of the private sector and the government to the ordinary people, behave much as would idealized Confucians, in a spirit of hard work, mutual help and cosmopolitanism. I see here, for example, a coherent communal relationship and tolerance among different races. Now, the great project of this society is the re-evaluation of Confucianism in the modern day. Yet precisely because Singapore is already such an ideal and almost totally Confucianized state, it follows naturally that one would ask why there is any need to establish or re-establish Confucianism here (emphasis again mine).³¹

Prof. Hsu may be puzzled, but to others such a move makes

²⁹Martin Lu, Confucianism: Its Relevance to Modern Society, Singapore : Federal Publications (S) Pte. Ltd., 1983, p.89.

³⁰Ibid., p.91.

³¹Prof. Hsu Cho-Yun, quoted in Tu Wei-Ming, Confucian Ethics Today: The Singapore Challenge, (Singapore: Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore, 1984), p.136.

sense if seen as an ideological move - that the PAP is tapping Confucianism to strengthen the moral backbone of Singaporeans as a defence against problems arising from affluence, modernization, and economic success! For some time now, the PAP government, apart from being glad that Singapore was indeed making rapid economic progress, was also keenly aware and worried about the kind of citizen that precisely such rapid economic growth has bred! The usual official argument goes thus: that while older Singaporeans who had to struggle during the traumatic days following independence fully appreciate the fruits of modernization, the newer generation younger Singaporeans take these for granted as their due, with the attitude of always wanting more but lacking any sense of obligation to society. Being too "individualistic" or "materialistic" are often seen as aspects of Western influence already affecting (and infecting) these younger citizens. One can however point out that the results of the PAP's own policies are exactly now being seen all too sharply in the consumerism and "materialism" that permeates the society and the general attitude of a people used to being generally well-off, that if they do not get more of what they want, they will get bored and even turn against the government. As has been pointed out at the end of Chapter II, there is a strongly emerging "class problem"; an affluent property-owning middle-class with the concomitant high expectations of more "good things", and a working

class being constantly asked to retrain for new skills to protect their jobs and their "bread-and-butter" - yet all somehow conscious of a widening gap between the rich and poor in Singapore society, and indeed, of Singaporeans themselves in danger of inhabiting different worlds on the same island.

Bearing in mind the PAP government's justification of its policies and style of ruling through its ability to constantly deliver economic progress - the "good things" and "bread-and-butter" - one can speculate that the movement to institute shared, traditional values has a wider agenda than just to motivate Singaporeans to be good, upstanding, socially cohesive, as well as prosperous, hard-working citizens. The PAP ideology of survival constantly prompts the party's leaders to look ahead for ways to ensure Singapore's continued economic progress against any storms ahead, and since its rule as a government has been explained and legitimised in its ability to deliver the goods, it is obvious that the PAP government will do whatever it can to continue to do so - and to stay in power. And thus, one answer was apparently to drum good home-spun Confucian values into the population - or at the very least, into the majority Chinese. In so doing, the PAP could be said to be merely pragmatic in wanting to manage its affairs (and future) well, by such a re-affirmation of "the central thrust of Confucian philosophy, namely, the emphasis placed on the proper and adequate management of

the practical affairs of man as against abstruse theorization or spiritual contemplation", and knowing it could do so since such an emphasis remains "the prevalent characteristic of Chinese cultural life in Singapore".³² At this point it might be helpful to have a brief summary of what Confucianism is, or can be today, and to identify a few of its central tenets relevant to Singapore society.

(i) Confucianism for today, and Singapore's "Shared Values"

Confucian thought may be regarded as a set of ideals and guides for political life generally accepted as state doctrine after 140 BC, but it still persists as an inseparable component of Chinese thought and is integral to the Chinese way of life. How one actually applies Confucianism of course, now as in the past, has always been open to various interpretations.

Confucius was born in 551 BC at a time of great internal conflict among feudal lords. It was also a time of constant external threat from hostile outside "barbarian" tribes. It was in this sort of context that Confucius developed his code of ethics and virtues for what was to become the ruling class - the junzi, or scholar-officials.

Rulers of the early Zhou period and others were idealized and chosen to embody his teachings. It seemed simple enough: leaders were to rule in a humane, benevolent and virtuous way, and the response to such a "moral and

³²Tham Seong Chee, Religion & Modernization: A Study of Changing Rituals among Singapore's Chinese, Malays & Indians (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1985), p.9.

humane government will be the respect, loyalty, and confidence of the people".³³ "Confucius taught a philosophy of government by men serving as moral exemplars rather than government by laws and institutions framed and administered by men".³⁴ Such persons of virtue were essential because "Confucius exalted virtue [te] as the foundation of government. 'He who rules by moral force [te] is like the pole-star, which remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it' [Analects 2:1]. Government should be in the hands of those who practise virtue first themselves, then the people will follow".³⁵ Such rule should even carry with it a disdain for material gain!

Confucius believed that the sullenness, resentment and uncooperative attitude of the people, together with the extensive of lawlessness, were the direct result of the greed and licentiousness of the rulers. According to him virtue in a ruler is of practical importance in the government of a state. The way to gain the respect and obedience of the people is for the ruler to set an example:...'It is by deeds of righteousness that men extend the influence of their way' [Analects 16:11].³⁶

In such manner then, order in a disorderly world would be preserved or re-created.

Still, "the ultimate purpose of government is the welfare of the common people. This is the most basic

³³Raymond Dawson, Confucius (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p.64.

³⁴Ibid., p.54.

³⁵D.Howard Smith, Confucius (Herts: Paladin, 1973), p.82.

³⁶Ibid.

principle in Confucianism and has remained unchanged throughout the ages".³⁷ Mencius, the second great Confucian philosopher who interpreted his master's moral principles for the 4th century BC also had as the basis of his political and social philosophy the understanding that "all government is established for the benefit of the people".³⁸ And yet he also had the view that while consultation with the people was possible, and necessary for the sake of political harmony,

the further step of government by the people is incompatible with the Confucian idea that men have distinct roles which they must perform for the sake of the orderly arrangement of society ('let the prince be a prince, the minister a minister, the father a father, and the son a son')...In the Confucian philosophy government has to be the function of a specialist ruling group.³⁹

Indeed, in later years the Confucian code became a state ideology, and one used often to preserve the status of a ruling elite and the institutions on which it relied. For example, the history of China in the early years of this century has often been described or interpreted as a struggle between those who would embrace and maintain Confucianism to preserve the traditional order, and those who would discard much of it for the sake of progress into the modern world.

³⁷D.C.Lau, Confucius: The Analects, trans. D.C. Lau, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), p.32.

³⁸Smith, op.cit., p.103.

³⁹Dawson, op.cit., pp.65-66.

To some, Singapore may already be a Confucian state, but that did not preclude objections being voiced to the "Confucian campaign", both in the early 80's with the announcement of plans to teach Confucianism in schools as part of the moral education programme, and also in the National Ideology-Shared Values debate in the late 80's. The objections were that the government was actually trying to bolster compliance, and to continue to justify the presence of strong, authoritarian rule. What appeared worrying was the negative political aspect of Confucianism usually identified as such traits as blind obedience to elders and to rulers. As one scholar has commented,

It is essential...to know what type of Confucianism we plan to introduce in a dynamic modern nation like Singapore. It certainly cannot be Confucianism as a political ideology; nor can it be Confucianism as a kind of outmoded scholarship. Instead, it must be Confucianism as a living, dynamic and developing ethic.⁴⁰

The government may indeed be arguing that it is using Confucianism as a "developing ethic" in the cause of nation-building. In incorporating Confucianism into a school curricula, and indeed into a National Ideology, there is a strong witness to the desire to strengthen Confucian values. As Julia Ching summarises, in a rather dead-pan manner,

This is not to say that a Confucian background or education is expected to accelerate modernization, but rather that it is being seen as a corrective to some of the by-products of modernization, such as extreme individualism or

⁴⁰Tu, op.cit., p.142.

moral permissiveness, and it is perceived as capable of contributing to a greater sense of cultural cohesiveness and Asian identity, and as an antidote to the continued spread of Marxism.⁴¹

Surely there are hints here that Confucianism may be used as a political ideology, if nothing else than to affirm Singapore as a successful Capitalist nation-state? Be that as it may, like the China of Confucius, Singapore political thinking senses threat everywhere, and nation-building, on a basic psychological level goes on. And as the National Ideology/Shared Values exercise shows, a greater sense of national identity is sought, as are a stronger and more reliable sense of social cohesion and a greater sense of civic duty, now seemingly diminished, as noted, by the rewards of self-interest or "individualism" in a growing successful economy. In short, the government is still trying to build a nation in the minds of its citizens, Confucianism is viewed as one way to lend it the staying power it will need to survive in a hostile world, and a National Ideology can be used as a tool to direct society and social change into preferred paths.

While keeping in mind what has already been said about Confucianism in operation as part of the PAP government ideology in Chapter II, we can still point to several features prominent in the workings of Singapore society.

⁴¹Julia Ching, "Some Problems of Modernization in Confucianism" in Confucian-Christian Encounters in Historical and Contemporary Perspective ed. Peter K.H.Lee (Lauriston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), p.392.

One of the most obvious concerns those who make up the "movers and shakers"; the leaders and rulers in society. The term "elitism" is bandied about, but Confucius did apparently rate a career in politics and state administration as the highest of aspirations. His ideal of government was "that it is an agency for ensuring that the influence and example of men of superior moral qualities is brought to bear on the population".⁴² The Singapore government has never made a secret of wanting only the best (nor of its difficulties in attracting them) into the PAP, and in recruiting and keeping able and skilled civil servants and senior administrators. Being so reliant on overseas trade and investment, it is no surprise then that the government see the same need Confucius did for strong and orderly administration. As such, a fundamental aspect of Confucianism - respect for authority as manifest in both the family and the polity - is seen as essential to success, present and future.

Confucius, after all, looked on "the people" as largely passive, to be moulded and influenced rather than consulted. He did not appear to have had too high an opinion of the intellectual and moral capacities of the common people, an attitude perceived shared by and large by the government leaders, leading to the inevitable charges of the PAP being domineering, disdainful of the simple wishes of the people, and fond of talking down to them. In

⁴²Dawson, op.cit., p.53.

other words, like an overbearing father.

Perhaps, it is precisely because the people are incapable of securing their own welfare unaided that the ruler's supreme duty is to work on their behalf in bringing about what is good for them. The common people should be treated with the same loving care given to babies who cannot fend for themselves...It is thus undeniable that Confucius advocated a strong paternalism in government and this remained unchanged as a basic principle throughout the whole history of Confucianism.⁴³

The problem now is that the "babies" seem to be growing up fast and crying out for more. So it should be a relief for the government then that "for the Chinese in general, cultural values are primarily moral in nature";⁴⁴ Such a Confucian emphasis on moral order must seem attractive to any society and its rulers in which materialism and the pursuit of self-interest are among the main social motivators. Thus Confucianism is happily used as a counter to what are easily called the West's "decadent" and socially harmful values. The tide may not be rolled back, but maybe the "babies" can learn to cry less frequently or more selectively.

This brings into focus "obedience" [xiao], a central virtue in Confucianism. The current government may stress its openness and a slightly more ready willingness to listen to feedback from Singapore's common people, but the citizens are expected to obey the dictates of the government when told what to do. It may lead to good social

⁴³Lau, op.cit., pp.36-37.

⁴⁴Lu, op.cit., p.89.

order, but does not allow easy stimulation of new ideas and creativity, nor room for analysis and critical observation - for those so inclined in the first place. So there is still the feeling that Confucian values operative now can be used to foster "blind obedience", leading to an almost unquestioning acceptance of state authority, even if it is in a multiracial society.

Last but definitely not least in terms of central Confucianist tenets for Singapore is the concept of the loyal family, with the young being obedient to and showing filial piety towards their elders. The family unit concept is extended to the state, with a ruler commanding absolute loyalty and compliance among his subjects as long as he is enlightened, just and devoted to their welfare and protection. If he is not, he can be removed. In fact, one could wonder about such Confucianist precepts about government, and ask if they could be applicable outside a small and cosy community. One could even marvel that they should have provided the ideology (and still can) of an enormous bureaucratic state. But "this could only happen because of the age-old dogma that the state was the family writ large, and the belief that the family virtues were a structural part of the cosmic order".⁴⁵

In thinking then about this Confucian precept of the family, we are thus reminded that it is one of the Shared Values, the basis for the National Ideology, and we can now

⁴⁵Dawson, op.cit., p.68.

use this as the starting point to look at the Confucian links between this and the other four Shared Values.

The White Paper on the Shared Values states in section 12 that "the sanctity of the family unit is not a value unique to Singapore" and that "all major faiths consider this a cardinal virtue". This may well be all too true, but citing other "faiths" to endorse the importance of the family does not disguise the fact that (as pointed out) the family is one of the central tenets in Confucianism. The government's understanding (and ideological use?) of this precept may well be reflected in this observation from a Singaporean academic:

One Confucian value already adopted by many Singaporeans is family cohesiveness. To a Confucianist, the family unit is important because it is the training ground for morality. And filial piety is important because it is the root of morality...It is possible that in actual practice too much emphasis upon family has watered down a person's devotion to his society and country as a whole.⁴⁶

Therefore, to have as a Shared Value, Family as the basic unit of society, is not just to imply that the norm in Asian societies is to have well-formed aggregates of couples and children all playing 'happy families' together, but that these same families have an important function in socializing their children into the commonly-accepted mores of their community, society, and indeed nation. It makes sense then for the government to state that the "home

⁴⁶Lu, op.cit., p.92

environment"; the family setting is to play an important part in "weaving" the Shared Values "into our way of life, and inculcate them in Singaporeans" (section 54,56). The Shared Values as a general interpretation of "Asian" values is to have the family as a "training ground" for Singaporean morality. An aspect of this may also be found in section 44, which states (or admits) quite clearly that "traditional Confucian family relationships are strictly hierarchical" and that, for example, "sons owe an absolute duty of filial piety and unquestioning obedience to fathers". However the section then goes on to assert that such family relationships today in Singapore are more of respect and less authoritarian (not "no longer" authoritarian) in nature. However, "in all these respects Singapore practices must continue, without eroding cohesion and loyalty within the family unit". Remembering that the state is supposed to be the family writ-large in Confucianist thought, one can seek to read between the lines, and come to the conclusion that such a section in the White Paper does not just deal with the relative virtues of the family as a basic unit of society - but carries also a hidden message and reaffirmation that for all its openness, the PAP Government insists on a hierarchical, paternalistic stand vis-a-vis its citizens; "unquestioning obedience" is still the name of the game; "filial piety" in terms of loyalty is still owed to the "State-Father" who has, and knows how to give good things

to his children: these honoured "Singaporean practices must (indeed) continue".

In the light of all this, the Shared Value Nation before community and society above self may take on a new hue. One is not exactly sure as to how this is a "shared" value, unless this is a "nationalism" call. The nation (or the ruling party?) is invariably right and ultimately has precedence above all communal interests; one's self-interests are to be subjugated to a higher good or calling: the nation. The "society above self" value has been directly identified as a "Confucian ideal" in section 41 of the White Paper, and the history of Singapore has also seen "society above self" in action: for example, in coping with the recession in 1985, the majority of the working class was asked, "for the greater interests of the nation", to suffer a reduction in pay and to forego pay increases until the recession was over, with the promise of financial restitution when that happened. The recession passed in two years, but it took considerably longer for employers to want to reward their workers for their sacrifices and efforts at maintaining profit margins for their companies. So although group sentiments may seem Asian enough, and according to Confucianist thought, "human relationships should start from the family and then extend to the nation and then to the world",⁴⁷ in the free-market capitalist

⁴⁷Lim Chee Then, "The Confucian Tradition And Its Future in Singapore: Historical, Cultural And Educational Perspectives" in Asian traditions And Modernization: Perspectives From Singapore,

economic that Singapore finds her niche in, one can ask if sacrifices are to be made for the sake of the group - what group? The multinationals or the workers? If "over the long term", such sacrifices "leads to greater success for all" - who gets a bigger slice of the pie? The idea that cultural precepts like communitarianism are being used to justify political control which justifies, and is dependent on economic control will be explored further in this chapter.

We can however also consider Analects 2:21:

Someone said to Confucius, 'Why do you not take part in government? The Master said, 'The Book of History says, "Oh! Simply by being a good son and friendly to his brothers a man can exert an influence upon government." In so doing a man is, in fact, taking part in government. How can there be any question of his having actively to "take part in government"?

This saying thus gives consolation to those who have no political power by saying that

the practice of social virtues within the family must itself make a real contribution to government, since it is contributing to the social harmony which is the purpose of government. So this is the Confucian version of the people's participation in government: they respond to examples sent down from above and contribute to the order of the state by securing harmony within the family, one of the microcosmic units of which the macrocosm of the state is composed.⁴⁸

Almost all the Shared Values are reflected one way or another in that quote. But here a Confucian reading of the shared values of the family and of the nation seeks to

ed. Yong Mun Cheong, (Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore, 1992), p.205.

⁴⁸Dawson, op.cit., pp.67-68.

affirm that the family, if it plays its socially-determined role, contributes to the well-running of the state, is in some way a political tool of the state, and even accedes to the authority of the state, even if orders are "sent down from above".

The Shared Value "Nation before community and society above self" assumes the right of the state to take priority over the rights of any citizen. Regard and community support for the individual as another Shared Value would seem to soften or take some harshness from that assumed right. This particular Value finds an echo in Analects 4:25: "Confucius said, 'Virtue is never isolated; it always has neighbours'". Good people indeed are always willing to distribute blessings to those in need, or below them. It is interesting to note that The Institute of Policy Studies, which had been asked by the government to conduct a study and report back on the national values needed for an ideology, had added two more values to the original four: "compassion for the less fortunate" was one new one which was transformed into "regard and community support for the individual". (The other was "honest government" - it was dropped from the final list).

The White Paper, in sections 30 to 33, does state that while communitarianism is indeed stressed, "we must remember that in Singapore society the individual also has rights which should be respected, and not lightly

encroached upon. The Shared Values should make it clear that we are seeking a balance between the community and the individual, not promoting one to the exclusion of the other". But, one asks in bewilderment, has not it already been stated that society - one component of which are communities - is above self? No answer to that, but one then reads "Singapore is a meritocratic society. Its free market system rewards individuals according to their contributions". It then admits that such an economic system does have "those who are less able and do less well" and "we must continue to do all we can to assist the needy". Who is the "we"? In promoting such a Shared Value, is the government going to take an active leading role in community-welfare support? The White Paper answers that Singapore "is a society whose members depend on and care for one another". Section 34 places the onus for such "regard" and "support" firmly on the Singaporean individual: "One way Singaporeans can put society above self and show concern for others is participating personally in this effort. Many Singaporeans volunteer to do community work. Many more contribute to community and welfare programmes". Sections 35 to 37 seek to legitimise such a stand by pointing to examples of Chinese, Malay, and Indian clan and mutual help associations as "good examples" of community support. In other words, while the government will provide minimal and basic social welfare assistance to those most at need, it is up to the ordinary Singaporean

individual to practise acts of active charity to "keep Singapore a humane society". And this is necessary to "help us avoid the dependent mentality" that can arise from depending on a welfare state. We thus have a paternal Confucian government which in many ways encourages its citizens to depend on it for wisdom and pragmatic guidance, but discourages any such dependency from those of its citizens which have not benefitted too much from its own policies involving economic growth. The White Paper uses the word "humane"; and surely that is significant when one learns that jen, variously translated as love, goodness, benevolence, kindness, human-heartedness, "is the greatest of all virtues and, in fact, the summation of all virtues" in the usage of Confucius.⁴⁹ Jen can also be translated as "humaneness".

A disciple said, "If one can be generous to people and can help the masses, how would that be? Could it be called humaneness?" Confucius said, "One would not only be humane; one would surely be a sage. Even [the legendary wise kings] Yao and Shun had trouble doing this". [Analects 6:30]

One could also be cynical and say that for this Shared Value the government is following in a Confucian tradition: having trouble, like some ancient wise sage-kings, in practising "humaneness" for the community.

The White Paper states that resolving issues through the Shared Value of consensus instead of contention "complements the idea of putting society before self". It

⁴⁹Smith, op.cit., p.69.

goes on, "It means accommodating different views of the way the society should develop, and working hard to develop a consensus on particular courses of action which have majority but not unanimous support, in order to bring as many people on board as possible" (section 14). But who in actual fact decides how "society should develop"? To admit to social - and political - policies not having "unanimous support", thus necessitating action "to bring as many people on board as possible" for "majority" acceptance reveals more of the government's method of dealing with consensus, contention and dissent to its policies, than a value for Singaporeans to follow in daily community life. The truth of the matter is that there may be an absence of genuine and persistent discussion and debate because the necessary methods, means and mechanisms to do so are not present, or are limited in scope. Letters to the "Forum" page of The Straits Times may bring up contentious issues - and may actually get printed - from time to time, but subsequent replies and discussion will be hindered due to space constraints and editorial policy. There are no powerful mass organisations like trade unions that have an independent power base, nor is "civil society" powerful enough to actually defeat or alter any set government policy. Professional institutions -like the Law Society - which have spoken out have had their influence severely curtailed. Consensus thus just means the thrusting upon the populace a pre-decided and pre-determined government point

of view. A good example of this approach would be this very White Paper on Shared Values itself. First, there was the bringing up of a subject or issue which is presented as a crisis affecting Singapore - in this case, speeches by senior Government leaders in 1988 on the need for Asian values, culminating in the President's speech at the opening of Parliament in January 1989 which highlighted four "core values", a "debate" incorporating studies and reports by appointed academics (the Quah book), and subsequent discussion with invited public representations, taking place within the PAP-controlled parliamentary bodies, and friendly media coverage, and ultimately the enshrining as public policy (in 1991) what the government had from the very start intended to do anyway. All this is supposed to show that the government seeks "consensus" with the people and is "consulting" them.

It is hard avoiding the conclusion that "consensus instead of contention" as a Shared Value for the Singaporean citizen may just mean being ready to accept as reality whatever the government presents to him or her as an issue or policy. One may ask, but one should not make too many waves if the issue in question has been presented as one with the nation/community/society's interests at stake. This is of course a Confucian paternalistic way of presenting or managing things: directives or advice from above to be obeyed, and the way policies and issues are "pre-determined" or decided for the populace reaffirms

again the Confucian notion apparently held by the Singapore government that governing - deciding for the common good - is an activity best left to "a specialist, elite ruling group".

The final Shared Value in the list, **Racial and religious Harmony** can be said to be an obvious one. Singapore is indeed a nation of immigrants of different races and religions, and it has been claimed that the economic success enjoyed so far has partly been because of the order arising from the lack of any serious inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflict. The White Paper does not mention this, but it is obvious that any "dis-harmony" in this area will hinder or weaken the pursuit of the ultimate government ideology: economic progress, a prospect serious enough for it to pass the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill. More will be said of this in the next chapter, and of what "harmony" means in that context, but here it is sufficient to note the Confucianist linkage; Confucius' "goal for society is universal order and harmony under the rule of a perfect sage".⁵⁰

Going on into the incorporation of actual religious and Confucian views in the White Paper, we find in sections 8 and 9 the argument that "each religion and culture encompasses many enduring values, but unfortunately we cannot use any single one of them as the basis for building a common Singaporean identity, without alienating the other

⁵⁰Smith, op.cit., p.62.

groups". That disclaimer is then followed by the solution: "a few key values which are common to all the major groups in Singapore, and which draw on the essence of each of these heritages. All communities can share these values...". This last assertion is obviously important to the government in wanting to avoid charges of "cultural arrogance" in appearing to promote Chinese Confucian values, for later on, in sections 39 to 40, effort is expended to show this is not so. The Shared Values are not "a subterfuge for imposing Chinese Confucian values" on non-Chinese Singaporeans, and thus, by implication the values are not Confucian. Yet the very next section (41) starts off by saying plainly, "Many Confucian ideals are relevant to Singapore. For example, the importance of human relationships and of placing society above self are key ideas in the Shared Values", implying surely that such Confucian concepts and more are incorporated in the Shared Values; that some of the values are Confucian!

To ensure then that the Shared Values "must be shared" and will be shared by "all communities", the government has to assert that "even for Chinese Singaporeans the Shared Values cannot just be Confucianism by another name", even if these same values do largely enshrine Confucian ideas! The government has to make this reassurance, because

If Confucianism is to be seen as having any relevance to Singapore at all, it must be considered more than merely Chinese. Indeed it must be recognized as even more East Asian than Chinese, and prospectively, more a part of world culture than just of Chinese or East Asian

culture. Only so could it have any real meaning for the people of this tiny island, the health and survival of which is so dependent on external forces...⁵¹

We are reminded here again not just of Confucian values being called Asian values, but whether these Asian values are also universal ones, as opposed to the beginning of this debate in which the government held up stereotyped "Asian values" as contrast and corrective to stereotyped "Western" ones.

Be that as it may, others have had no problem identifying Confucian elements in the Shared Values, even if the government has appeared disingenuous about it. Two Singapore social scientists (one of whom is a Member of Parliament) has stated clearly that the Singapore government is "trying to push ahead with the promotion of Confucian values in a broader format, such as building them into the National Ideology".⁵² We can consider also remarks - or confirmation - made by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister and now Senior Minister, who told the audience at the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention that it was necessary in the Singapore situation "to make special efforts to pass on core cultural values, those dynamic parts of Confucian culture which if lost will lower

⁵¹Wm.Theodore de Bary, Confucianism as an Aspect of East Asian and World Civilizations (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), pp.1-2.

⁵²John Wong and Aline Wong, Confucian Values as a Social framework for Singapore's Economic Development (Taipei: Chung Hua Institution for Economic Research, 1989), p.26.

(Singapore's) performance". Indeed, he said, overseas Chinese in South-East Asia had succeeded because they upheld Confucian values.⁵³ Is it too far-fetched to surmise that the core, cultural values he spoke of and which he identified as Confucian were perhaps the same ones passed in Parliament as the Shared Values making up the National Ideology, just a few months earlier? The last word should go to Confucian scholar Professor Wu Teh Yao, a former director of the Institute of East Asian Philosophies, who stated that the White Paper contained what he described as values which were essentially Confucian. He identified the linkages between the nation, the family and the community as an integral feature of Confucianism, and said, "The emphasis on family and nation is also unique to Chinese, Confucian culture. The Chinese characters for nation are a combination of nation (*guo*) and family (*jia*) with nation above family".⁵⁴

There should be no doubt then that the Shared Values/National Ideology do incorporate Confucian values.

(ii) "Asian" Values and Ideology

Is the conclusion then that "Asian" values are Confucian values - and vice-versa? We ask this because we remember that this Shared Values exercise came about because of the Singapore government's perception of the erosion of "Asian" and especially Chinese cultural values.

⁵³The Sunday Times, August 11, 1991.

⁵⁴The Straits Times, January 9, 1991.

The White Paper itself starts by quoting the President in his January 1989 speech to Parliament: "Traditional Asian ideas of morality, duty and society which have sustained and guided us in the past are giving way to a more Westernized, individualistic, and self-centred outlook on life...If we are not to lose our bearings, we should preserve the cultural heritage of each of our communities, and uphold certain common values which capture the essence of being a Singaporean". The section above has identified and analysed the "common values" thus chosen, but one can still ask: are such values identified because they already exist in Singapore society, and therefore the intention is to summarise them into a formal statement to serve the cause of unity (akin to a Durkheimian conscience collective)? Or is the government saying that such Asian values do not exist, and recommends that they should (even to the extent of legislating them into existence)?

This just reveals again the preoccupation the political leaders have with this concept of "Asian values", and on one level, the Shared Values issue is a continuation of this preoccupation. But what exactly are "Asian" values? Are those chosen as the Shared Values only found in Singapore, and alien to "Western" societies? Are there values that could be regarded as universal ones? S. Rajaratnam, long respected as the "ideologue" of the PAP, when he was in the PAP Cabinet had this to say:

I have very serious doubts as to whether such a thing as 'Asian values' really exists - or for

that matter 'Asian' anything - Asian unity, Asian socialism, Asian way of life and so on. It may exist as an image but it has no reality. If it has any meaning at all it is merely a convenient way of describing the heterogeneous, conflicting and complex network of beliefs, prejudices and values developed in the countries which for geographical purposes have been grouped as being in Asia.⁵⁵

An understanding such as this has not however prevented stereotyped generalisations regarding the concept of Asian values, whereby it is held that all Asian peoples, whatever their cultural, geographical, ethnic, religious or historical differences, still share certain common features in their philosophy of life. So, for example, Asians by and large are more spiritual, more religiously inclined, and less materialistic than Westerners. They are stoic ("inscrutable" is a familiar word) in the face of adversity. They are attuned to Nature, and they respect and adjust to the environment. They study hard and seem to have a special affinity for education. This kind of stereotyped or idealized account of Asian values can be summed up thus: "Spirituality, moral preoccupations, renunciation and ascetism are the hallmarks of Asian mentality. Asians are therefore often regarded as tolerant people, non-aggressive, non-violent and non-militant in their social relations with one another. They are also portrayed as eminently peace-loving peoples who prefer to settle their disputes and conflicts by mutual agreements, rather than

⁵⁵S.Rajaratnam, "Asian Values and Modernization" in Asian Values and Modernization, ed. Seah Chee Meow (Singapore: Singapore University press, 1977), p.95.

resort to war or formal litigations".⁵⁶ Ho goes on to properly debunk such sentiments: "Like most half-truths this somewhat flattering description of the characteristics of all Asians and the common values which they are supposed to espouse, may be pleasing to hear but is hardly anywhere near the truth".⁵⁷ Indeed, even a cursory look into the history - past and present - of Asian countries reveal violence, ethnic hostilities, wars of greed and subjugation, and more, which should put the lie to simplistic definitions of what Asian values are. One remembers Japan's occupation of Korea, and later, in South-East Asia. Vietnam brought in, and humiliated the Americans. Military regimes in Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), and Indonesia had no compunctions about using force to quell dissidence - whether it came from education-loving students or nature-loving peasants. The Marcos regime in the Philippines showed what it thought of ascetism in the steady misappropriation of public funds for private bank accounts. Racial riots, and the detention of political opponents - without trial - under the Internal Security Act have happened in both Singapore and Malaysia. Rival tribes still fight each other - in the midst of a United Nations sponsored "peace" - in Kampuchea. The introduction of "market forces" into Mainland China's economy has led to

⁵⁶Ho Wing Meng, Asian Values and Modernisation - A Critical Interpretation (Singapore: Chopmen Enterprises/Department of Philosophy, University of Singapore, 1976), p.10.

⁵⁷Ibid.

widespread corruption, joblessness in the countryside, and greater repression of dissenting voices (cf. Tiananmen Square). So much then for seemingly satisfying stereotypes which are seen to be superficial slogans, when examined a little closely. If it is recognised that the value-systems of the different nations within Asia do differ from each other, and one may find it hard to seek to reduce such diverse value-systems into any common cultural denominator, then one does wonder whether there can be such a thing as "Asian values" in the sense that this term denote a set of common components in the value-systems to which Asians (of all sorts) consciously subscribe.

So why then do political leaders talk so quickly and glibly about Asian values? Surely one reason would be that "Asian values" - like "Back to Basics" - is a politically useful term with a certain emotional resonance which Asian politicians find useful to bandy about, when having a siege-mentality in the midst of uncomfortable changes facing their nations. The other possible reason for the term to be used is, of course, when these same Asian politicians wish to react against perceived undesirable or unwanted effects of "Western" lifestyles and attitudes on the behaviour and attitudes of the younger generation. "Asian values" are then put forward as morally, socially and culturally superior to those from, or of, the West, because they are supposed to maintain greater harmony and social cohesion in society. Along with this is the often

expressed rationale: "We welcome and accept Western technology, but we don't welcome or accept Western values". There is then an attempt to have one without the other; to believe that there can be a sharp dividing line between importing Western technology, and at the same time keeping out the values that come with it. Singapore's political leaders have expressed such notions.

But can such a dividing line be drawn so sharply? A cursory look at some of the appliances - products of technology - we take for granted in Singapore, and the effects they may have on our lives present a simple example. Households and families may be encouraged to have and use washing-machines, refrigerators, tinned foods and microwave ovens, but at the same time do not all these conveniences also introduce a whole new style of living and working, and along with it, a new system of values? If the uses of technology can be bad as well as good, then it may also be hard, for example, to make absolute judgements about the benefits or disadvantages to humankind of such things as the invention of explosives, the internal combustion engine, the computer or television. The point is that every new technology carries with it not just a new and hopefully more efficient way of getting things done, but also a new way of living and a new standard of valuing (or disvaluing) one's previous life-style. As such, modern technology, whatever form it may be in, is seldom value-free in the sense that it serves solely the function of

solving some specific or technical problem. We could instead say that every new technology or invention comes about in response to a problem-situation of some kind. If it indeed helps to solve the problems or answers certain needs, then it becomes accepted and widely used. But the very existence of such new technology presupposes certain realised needs, preferences, wants, and desires - in other words, values. Surely then it is not possible to want the "technology", and then go on to try to ignore or dismiss the "value" premises that come with it.

Technology and science have furnished advanced capitalism with everything to conceal class differences and legitimate political power. Domination no longer requires political repression; the manipulation of needs suffices. Industrial society creates necessities and satisfies them. The very freedom of choice between commodities, new brands and modes of relaxation is transformed into an instrument of domination.⁵⁸

If this is true, the Singapore government's Shared Values project appears to be an attempt to hold back the waves of "Western-values" domination, by holding up instead the nebulous concept of "Asian values". The rationale for such a project also implies that Singapore is a once "Asian" culture, now being profaned by Western values. One conveniently forgets that Singapore is an immigrant nation, with many different cultures, and that if there is indeed a distinctive Asian/Singaporean culture, it is through this mingling, mixing, and interacting of all these elements -

⁵⁸Jorge Larraín, The Concept of Ideology (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p.204.

including the Western ones, inevitable and unavoidable considering how much Singapore is dependent on foreign technology, expertise, and markets - and, at the same time, priding itself as a cosmopolitan city-state. And if "Western" concepts and values like "democracy", "human rights", "freedom", "debate" do get enough thought to have local citizens pondering, comparing and contrasting their political system with others, then such Western values become threatening, and must be dealt with. They are not to be considered liberating in any sense. A local political scientist has observed that the concern is not on Western values per se, since many of such values are "positive and progressive", but on the "liberalizing tendencies" usually associated - perhaps exaggeratedly so - with the West. "The symptoms go beyond the crave for Western style dress and pop music and other forms of entertainment. Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and Prime Minister Goh have observed the growing preference for Western-style democracy and a more critical posture against authorities. This is in sharp contrast to the fiduciary type of government-people relations characteristic of Confucian political culture...Responding to such trends, many a government leader has called upon Singaporeans to return to their basic 'Asian values'".⁵⁹ It is worthwhile here, I think, to have (and to consider) the

⁵⁹Hussin Mutalib, "Singapore's Quest For a National Identity - The Triumphs and Trials of Government Policies" in Imagining Singapore ed. Ban Kah-Choon, Anne Pakir and Tong Chee Kiong (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1992), pp.82,83.

following extended quote:

To be sure, to recognize the need and urgency of reviving or retaining the traditional Eastern values is not the same thing as to advocate a complete return to the old ways or a total replacement of Western values with Eastern values. Such an extreme course is neither feasible nor advisable - not feasible because we are no longer living in the old times, and not advisable because traditional values are themselves not perfect either. It does mean that we need to strike a balance between conservation and adventure, between collective interest and individual freedom, between social discipline and personal initiative, and between continuity and change. Here it is worth repeating...that the Eastern tradition and the Western tradition, though diametrically opposed in assumptions and approaches, are not necessarily incompatible, since they are not so much conflicting with and contradictory to each other in nature as divergent in emphases and orientations. Precisely because of this, they can be made to complement each other in a useful way...As a matter of fact, traditional or Eastern values have co-existed with modern or Western values in most developing Asian nations, and in at least some outstanding cases, they have clearly eased the pains and reduced the human cost of traumatic change brought about by modernization.⁶⁰

Singapore is obviously one of the "outstanding cases" in its "modernization" results, but the government has seemed unwilling to take the sort of reasoned approach vis-a-vis "values" advocated in the quote above, or to consider carefully the relative virtues of the various Western values. It has instead easily and ideologically opted for labelling certain values or attitudes as undesirable. One example would be "individualism", identified in the White

⁶⁰Chang Pao-Min, Traditional Values and Modern Singapore: random thoughts on the relevance of the eastern heritage (Singapore: Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Graduate Studies, Nanyang University, 1979), pp.26-27.

Paper as an "alien lifestyle and value". The government seems eager to focus on the negative aspect of individualism, while conveniently ignoring the fact that if individualism is now rampant in Singapore society, it is as a consequence of the PAP's own long-term economic policies which embraced capitalism and *laissez-faire* (albeit controlled) concepts. As such, one can theorize as to how "individualism" is in fact being reinforced or encouraged by the government's own marketplace-economics policies, and its meritocracy policies. Such "marketplace economics" or "the logic of the marketplace", for example, calculates the value of the individual in utilitarian terms, and not in social or moral concepts. This kind of utilitarianism surely encourages individualism, and since the government believes in, and emphasizes "free-market forces", this economic individualism is actually being strengthened by government policies and economic successes.

The government has also consistently promoted meritocracy, in line with its efforts to promote "excellence" in all fields from Singaporeans. But this also has the result of encouraging the individual Singaporean to demand what is perceived by them as their just or deserved economic (and other) rewards, without sufficient care or concern for the social supports that are the foundation of such an objective. Further developments also occur at both individual and societal levels, for meritocracy legitimizes different income levels or stratification which then

becomes regarded as the natural and logical result of the different levels of individual work efforts. To show care and concern for the "poor and needy" then becomes voluntary; they are viewed as acts of charity rather than a necessary moral or intrinsic social obligation. All this surely adds to the growth of individualism. Indeed, "individualism is seen to be both the dominant ideology of capitalist society and a corrosive belief system which stands in opposition to collective and traditional modes of existence".⁶¹

Being aware of such growth, the government is negative about it, even though its own economic policies encourage it. Its solution, as we know, is by moral and religious education, including Confucian ethics, in schools and by Shared Values constructs for (presumably) adults. The government also continues to practice the ideology or politics of "survival"; reminding the public that Singapore is "small", and thus the breaking-up of any national cohesion or consensus by the demands of individuals (or indeed adhering to individualism as a personal ideology) can mean the end for all and the ending of the good life for everyone. This works, of course, when "everyone" is happy with what he or she presently has, but it does not remove the fact that the same people are becoming more aware of the growing gap between those who have - and those

⁶¹Bryan S. Turner, Religion and Social Theory (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), p.155.

who have even more! And questions are being raised as to why "individualistic" demands made by those at the top of the economic pole seem to be met more readily than similar demands from those further down the ladder. Or are such queries to be fobbed off by counter-charges of inciting "envy and resentment"?

Governing a society that is 75% Chinese, it apparently does not want to look at the behaviour of Chinese businessmen (and women) and entrepreneurs, which in terms of individualism, materialism and selfishness, could hold its own with that of any Western counterpart. Such local behaviour would probably be praised as fine "entrepreneurial spirit"! And if there was so much distaste about individualism, why doesn't the government tackle the root problem, and move away from capitalism? Again, the answer comes from the country's own history. Singapore started off as an immigrant society, and money-making was the immigrants' major concern.

Subsequently, the government's all-out efforts to promote economic growth and modernization might have unwittingly reinforced the motive to make money. Actually it has often resorted to money as an incentive to good performance. So the dilemma and conflict of values here is how to strive for economic growth without in the meantime fostering in Singaporeans an overly-materialistic outlook of life. The PAP's answer is to re-establish traditional values as cultural ballasts to keep a tight rein on the undesirable effects of economic affluence.⁶²

A familiar answer by now, but a more relevant answer

⁶²Lu, op.cit., p.87.

(or reason) may simply be that the PAP government does not want change in its economic and political institutions. Its political dominance or power or success relies on economic control, and by the way it seeks to manage (or manipulate) culture in terms of values, it seems to believe that economic control rests on culture. It is readily admitted now, as an editorial (July 1, 1994) in The Straits Times puts it, that "a consumer-oriented society bent on wealth creation is playing havoc with traditional moral and family values". Such "havoc" includes social changes which make even more visible emerging classes in a legitimised class structure which surely must have repercussions for future social and political developments or trends. As has been noted earlier, questions about such class inequalities have been quickly dismissed or condemned by the government as dangerous in that they promote "envy and resentment". And this again reveals the government's approach to such problems or implications: to view them in terms of attitudes or values to be changed or reinforced or encouraged, and not in terms of structures or institutions. The method (or indeed, belief) here that a change in values will result in the needed change in social practice is common enough in Singapore - as evidenced all too clearly in the constant campaigns and enthusiastic exhortations, ranging from having more children to flushing the toilet after use. This truly reflects a basically Chinese and Confucian cultural bias: that self-improvement must surely

follow if one heeded good advice and exhortation. "Confucius also includes social action and self-improvement in the practice of humanity...Confucius believed that if enough people behaved in such a manner, then the problems of society would gradually become manageable".⁶³

For all that the Shared Values (as Asian values) are supposed to include people of all social levels, religions and ethnic origins, and "to preserve the cultural heritage of each of our communities", one still gets the impression that these Shared Values actually embody a conservative middle-class morality while quietly shunting to one side any awareness of class consciousness. In that sense, although they are supposed to represent "common values", they actually reflect special or elite class interests, from ensuring the government (or the PAP) stays in power, to ensuring "harmony" reigns for the sake of the nation - meaning everyone, especially the working class, continues to put the economic success story of the nation above all else. The government's desire for continuity and the *status quo* is masked as a cultural crisis and a cultural reaffirmation. There is the fear too that for all the years of political stability and economic growth and rewards, the people of Singapore are not truly happy with the materialism and consumerism way of life. There is high alienation; capitalism under a paternalistic authoritarian

⁶³Thomas Cleary, The Essential Confucius (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1992), p.4.

government has somehow not produced a satisfying and meaningful way of life; people are turning to religion; skilled professionals are emigrating.⁶⁴ At a Pre-University Seminar for teenage students held in June 1994, the students themselves complained that society placed too much stress on material values. When told the standard platitudes - "not to get caught up unthinkingly in the rat-race, but to make time to climb mountains or help the needy, or do whatever they wish" - the students replied by blaming the "system" for their apathy or attitudes; the education system, the Government, the schools, their parents and society at large! One of them said, "You want balanced individuals, change the education system to help us become balanced individuals".⁶⁵ In other words, change the structures instead of our beliefs and values by preaching at us. Is this just teenage angst against adult authority, or dare we hope that the youths were sensitive to, and had something, concerns and grievances included, to contribute to nation-building? Anxious itself over the changes, perhaps in unforeseen or uncomfortable directions that might force it to be more liberalised, the government reacts by sharing its anxieties in the form of an announced cultural crisis, in the hope that manipulating values will do the trick without touching, or dealing with, the basic

⁶⁴Chiew Seen Kong, "National Identity, Ethnicity and National Issues" in Quah, op.cit., pp.73-75.

⁶⁵The Straits Times Weekly Edition, June 25, 1994.

institutions themselves.

The unconscious aim of the ideologist is to diffuse his neurosis through society by creating and inducing states of anxiety, such that the actions of irrational persons such as himself will have the appearance of rationality. The ideologist in action thus tries to convert the abnormal into the norm by 'irrationalizing' the surrounding society with fears and anxiety. We might call this the Law of ideological irrationalization.⁶⁶

Seen thus, the Shared Values are not just the National Ideology; they are an ideology, constructed to serve political functions and class-interest agendas. We have seen that as an ideology it proposes that the state or nation must take priority over the rights of any person; its Confucian elements add its patriarchal, authoritarian and elitist aspects; and it is basically safely conservative with the desire to have things remain the way they are, without any undue reference to uncomfortable (and "Western") ideas of economic or social justice, or human rights, and without making institutional changes. As one sociologist has observed, the success of the government in the generation of ideology "resides to a great extent in its ability to harness certain cultural forces already at work in the society and to project these as being the only sensible ones...ideology must necessarily be an expression - indeed the key expression - of culture".⁶⁷ This ideology is thus presented as natural, so that criticising them even

⁶⁶Lewis S. Feuer, Ideology and the Ideologists (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p.135.

⁶⁷Clammer, The Sociology..., pp.17, 19.

appears wrong and unpatriotic and disloyal. "One of the most important ways in which 'misrepresentation' or 'misrecognition' occurs is in bestowing an aura of 'naturalness' or a halo of 'disinterestedness' on the social relations which they represent".⁶⁸ Here the naturalism appears to include a reference to cultural values, as well as a "nationalism" appeal.

We can end this section by remembering again that the Shared Values or National Ideology do contain Confucian elements, and could be understood or regarded as generally Confucian. It might be good therefore for us to consider the following quotation, and ask whether this has already happened, or is happening in Singapore:

if Confucianism were to become a state ideology, it would be used to legitimize autocratic rule and to advocate unthinking respect for authority, submissiveness and obedience to the status quo. In this way, it could easily be used by a particular political machinery to enhance its own power or control. This concern is not unfounded. It has been one historic expression of Confucianism.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Kenneth Thompson, Beliefs and Ideology (Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1986), p.46.

⁶⁹Tu, op.cit., p.168.

(iii) A Singaporean Civil Religion?

Can the Shared Values or National Ideology, as an ideology, be identified as a civil religion then? Indeed, are there elements of the National Ideology which make sense when one sees it as a civil religion? Is Confucianism really the state ideology, and is Confucianism really the civil religion? Questions like these, and more, can be asked, but before any sort of answer can be ventured, it would be helpful to have a summary of what could be loosely termed the sources of a Singaporean civil religion.

Firstly, echoing the Durkheimian tradition, one must recognise that every functioning society; every relatively stable society will have a set of shared beliefs, values and symbols; a common set of ideas and ideals that express the highest values of the society and that are considered special or "sacred". The collective sharing of these values serves to remind the members of the society of what they hold in common, thereby providing for the order, stability, and integration of the society as a whole, as against the conflicts constantly present in daily life. Collective rituals and rites will be held regularly, during which the shared values are celebrated and reaffirmed, and they make up the specific mechanisms through which these states are affirmed and sustained. There is some religious significance invested in these shared values and symbols, but the setting up of a national religion in a situation of religious pluralism prevents any one religion from being

used by all in the society as a source of generalized meaning. However, people still need to invest their activity with meaning, especially when that activity brings together persons of different religious backgrounds. Therefore a substitute meaning system is sought, and, if found, the people whose activities have been facilitated by it will tend to exalt it.

It can be asked, however, why Singapore would need a set of shared beliefs or values if it is already a "functioning" and viable society, and if such success or stability is due to the PAP being able, so far, to deliver economic progress as well as keeping a tight control over society. The answer in this case is simply that the Shared Values are precisely to keep Singapore viable according to PAP thinking and interpretation. Acceptance and adherence to the Shared Values, so the PAP believes, will enable further economic prosperity and thus further PAP success. The attitude of the PAP government indeed seems to imply that it can simply invoke certain values and expect to see the desired effects once people accept them. Thus it has been pushing people to accept what has been deemed correct Asian values with exhortations of the need for a National Ideology based on these values, and the dire warning that Singapore will suffer economically and may not even survive as an Asian society into the next century, without these Shared Values. The need for such a "push" equally implies that the PAP is aware of opposition to its attempt to set

up a National Ideology with these Shared Values, whether it is seen as indifference and apathy or as active objections from the public and members of Parliament. So if the PAP is trying to make the National Ideology the "dominant ideology", it does not appear that it has fully succeeded yet.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the PAP government presses on with its launch of a National Ideology in Singapore. We remind ourselves that this was defined as the identification of certain abstract values common to all Singaporeans. Furthermore, this move was supposed or meant to synthesize the essence of each of the ethnic community's heritages for common adoption. "The overriding goal must surely be to complement existing efforts aimed at fostering group solidarity with something of a higher value which Singaporeans would look up to as the guiding parameters of their lives as citizens of the State".⁷¹ Civil values were also constantly emphasized by the government through various mass campaigns which were launched to inculcate what were deemed certain desirable values in the life of Singaporeans. And so slogans, posters, publicity blitzs, even specially commissioned and newly created "national"

⁷⁰N. Abercrombie, S. Hill, B.S. Turner, The Dominant Ideology Thesis (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980) indeed argues that supporters of the dominant ideology thesis tend to overestimate the extent to which different groups are integrated into the dominant culture, as well as underestimating the extent to which different groups can come up with ideas which run counter to dominant ideologies.

⁷¹Mutalib, op.cit., p.79.

songs with such titles as "Stand Up for Singapore" and "Count On Me, Singapore" were presented, all intended to sell certain positive images of the Singaporean ethos and identity. Campaigns had such themes as "Keep Singapore Green", "Courtesy is Our Way of Life", "One Nation, Many Races", "No Smoking" and "Keep Fit and Healthy". Singapore did not lack symbols too; such expressive symbols were given added significance by way of public occasions such as national holidays, rituals and ceremonies. We can point, as an example, to the National Day celebrations, held around August 9 each year. These celebrations have always tended to centre around some common themes which Singaporeans of different ethnic backgrounds and walks of life can identify or associate themselves with. It is obvious that there was the hope and desire that all these expressive slogans and symbols, regularly repeated in mass rituals and joyful settings such as the National Day celebrations, could and would help instil virtues and values in the hearts and minds of the people of Singapore. Citizens are encouraged, of course, to buy and display State flags at their homes (in previous years there had been not-so-subtle grumbling in the press that residents in private housing and condominiums -presumably more well-off and more Westernized - were more reluctant or unwilling to display the flag, as compared to those in public housing who apparently were more obviously proud of their country). There is also a "Pledge to the Nation" which students especially are

supposed to know and affirm:

We, the citizens of Singapore,
pledge ourselves as one united people,
regardless of race, language or religion,
to build a democratic society
based on justice and equality
so as to achieve happiness, prosperity
and progress for our nation.

Perhaps then, from the perspective of the authorities, all these national songs, slogans, symbols, creeds and the like, in the context of officially sponsored (or decreed) ceremonies, celebrations, or rituals of creed-taking "could help people externalize and broaden their otherwise insular ethnic horizons to embrace one that is Singaporean in orientation".⁷² In other words, to promote loyalty to the nation and to what is "Singaporean"; to give allegiance and devotion to "a higher value which Singaporeans would look up to" as a guide to how to live their lives properly as citizens - maybe even to provide a sense of ultimate meaning to one's Singaporean citizenship (one of the "national songs" begins "This is my country, this is my land; this is my future..."). It seeks to make people feel good about themselves as participants in the nation; a common destiny is possible and imperative; all as a "team" or "family" will swim -or sink - together; indeed Singaporeans can thrive and survive in the years ahead because they have and accept "shared values" which will enable them to do so. We can begin to postulate then that Singapore's form of a civil religion is exactly the

⁷²Ibid., p.77.

combination of all these beliefs, rites, and symbols which the government is using in an attempt to sacralize the perceived values of Singapore society, and to anchor the nation in the context of a special or ultimate system of meaning. The government is firm on the necessity of Singapore being a "secular state", and has refused to include a value such as "belief in God" (which Malaysia's Rukunegara and Indonesia's Pancasila includes) in the National Ideology. This is in line with its wariness on the role and influence of religions, especially when, for example, the different religions aggressively compete with each other for new converts. This indeed was one of the factors given for the necessity of the Religious Harmony Bill, and the Bill itself can be understood as a piece of pre-emptive legislation to maintain religious harmony by, in this instance, seeking to lessen the tension between the religious groups. It seems then that the government is trying to hold up this new meaning system, the civil religion as a primary source of devotion and commitment itself (the "operative religion"). It is not expected, of course, to replace the various religions, but seems designed to add a dimension to the existing religions, bearing in mind the Confucian values incorporated. The National Ideology/Shared Values were debated, the procedure for getting it recognized went without undue problems, and the government would thus say it was respected and accepted, and even obeyed even while in the process of

getting these same Shared Values inculcated in Singaporeans - the values appear understood as present and actually functioning, while seemingly diminishing, in the ongoing life of society. Language and imagery of purpose and destiny has been used; the President of Singapore is quoted in the opening pages of the White Paper on Shared Values as saying that the core values should be "enshrined" as a National Ideology to "bond us together as Singaporeans, with our own distinct identity and destiny". Senior government ministers at the beginning of this National Ideology exercise had posed questions as to the ultimate purpose of Singapore - whether it was to be rootless without proper, grounded Asian roots and culture, and thus headed for an uncertain future or destiny in the face of 'Western'/'alien' threats to Singaporean lifestyles and values -indeed, to the "Singapore (Asian) Way of Life". A glimpse of the ideology of purpose and destiny behind the Shared Values can be seen in the concluding section of the White Paper:

Through careful guidance and patient consensus building, we can influence, even if we cannot completely determine, the values which future generations of Singaporeans will share, and thus improve their chances of thriving and prospering together. This is a key responsibility of the present generation.

There is a challenge to help motivate each others' commitment and even sacrifice (a word not new to Singaporean workers) to the nation's interests, which befitting its historical role as a "commercial emporium"

are economic ones. The Shared Values are to enhance and continue economic progress; Singaporeans are to work for that, as well as enjoying such economic fruits of their labour. Singapore's survival and destiny as a nation depends on it. As The Next Lap, the PAP government's blueprint for the future puts it, "All our plans depend on strong economic growth...To reach the next milestone, Singaporeans will have to work hard, work smart, continuously hone our skills and simultaneously acquire new ones...The next step is to make it to the top league [of thriving modern economies]". The goal is to become "a business hub of the Asia Pacific" since "by becoming a hub city, we can bring prosperity to the region and ourselves".⁷³ Singaporeans will "thrive" and "prosper" as long as they continue on the charge for the sake of the country; the "national ethos" as the February 11, 1993 editorial of The Straits Times puts it, is "Work hard" and "is a given in the Singapore experience". In short, it is part of the Singapore Way of Life. It promotes materialism and the good things of life, and as such helps people be happy as "participants" in the ongoing economic life of the nation. There will always be some who will doubt the validity of such claims for the nation, but one cannot completely "determine" that everyone will accept such values on cue: there is the realisation that the promotion

⁷³The Government of Singapore, Singapore: The Next Lap (Singapore: Times Editions Pte.Ltd., 1991), pp.57,59.

of a national ideology or civil religion has just started, and it "will take many years" (section 54, The White Paper).

In such a way then is the meaning of the nation, and the core values that unite Singaporeans defined; in such a way is the nature of the civil religion revealed. Civil religion is to be influential in shaping the course of the nation, so Singapore as a society and nation has to represent an (Asian) ideal of itself to its members. Only then can there be, using Herberg's language, "the sanctification of the society and culture of which it [civil religion] is the reflection".

To talk of "culture" is to remind ourselves of the Confucian influence and elements in the National Ideology. The government leaders obviously had faith in Confucian teachings' civilizing power, for "the civilizing impact of Confucianism on civil living should not be underrated...In that sense, Confucianism was a 'civil religion' that has positive connotations".⁷⁴ Almost as an aside, Lee also mentions that "Lee Kuan Yew as a matter of fact takes Confucianism seriously...as a civil sanction, in Will Herberg's sense of 'civic religion'".⁷⁵ Another similar observation mentions: "Singapore, in the person of Lee Kuan

⁷⁴Peter K.H. Lee, "'Civil Religion' and 'Secularization' in Confucianism: Han Yu and Lin Chung-Yuan. Implications For Theological Critique in Asia Today" in Ching Feng, Vol.XXXIV, No.1, January 1991, p.32.

⁷⁵Ibid., p.42.

Yew has assumed some Confucianized autocratic characteristics, and it is interesting that he has taken special interest in Confucianism (as a form of 'civil religion' in support of the government?).⁷⁶ When the Shared values were first mooted, the public had no difficulty agreeing that the values were important for the country's social and political well-being and are, to an extent, already imbued in the people. Again, with the Confucianist tone of the Shared Values in mind, we become aware that "Confucian emphasis on political and social responsibility explains why during much of history Confucianism served the function of a 'civil religion'".⁷⁷ One might even go as far as saying that the moral norms and values as elaborated through the National Ideology represents an intellectually sublimated and extended version of the kind of city-state Confucian civic morality which the government shares.

Here we must take notice of the emphasis on nationalism in the Shared Values, and of the use of nationalism as an ideology in a new nation like Singapore. "The fact remains that most governments of post-war independent countries clearly recognize that nationalism, wherever it is manifested, emphasizes the need to nurture

⁷⁶Nicolas Standaert, "Confucian-Christian Dual Citizenship - A Political Conflict?" in Ching Feng, Vol.XXXIV, No.2 June 1991, p.116.

⁷⁷Hans Kung and Julia Ching, Christianity and Chinese Religions (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p.75.

a political ideology for rallying the people together in a spirit of solidarity and also to develop a set of values which the nationals of those countries can understand and relate to".⁷⁸ Singapore is clearly one of these "countries", and we can ask if the "political ideology" mentioned can be a civil religion being developed through a national ideology. It has been noted too that civil religion may be a very general form of nationalism, but in the Singapore context of the presence of Confucian values, nationalism and Confucianism are not mutually exclusive. "Indeed, where Confucianism serves as a stabilizing force, nationalism has acted as a catalyst for innovation..."⁷⁹ They need each other and have helped each other.

For many people today, nationalism is still the most powerful force for social transformation albeit a morally ambiguous force. It motivates the peoples of the developing world to attempt to 'catch up' with the developed and highly technological societies of the West and Japan, not only in order to enjoy better economic well-being, but also to earn a greater sense of dignity and self-respect.⁸⁰

It can be proposed then that the Singapore civil religion consists of two aspects: secularized Confucianism, and nationalism.

A general summing up of the characteristics of

⁷⁸Ho Wing Meng, "Value Premises Underlying the Transformation of Singapore" in Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore, ed. Kernial Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), p.673.

⁷⁹Ching, "Some Problems..." op.cit., p.392.

⁸⁰Ibid., p.393.

Singapore that would seem to have facilitated a civil religion are: the strong nationalism, the pervasive role of religion(s) in society, including that of Confucianism in the framing and interpretation of the Shared Values, the development and recognition of a "Singaporean" people and a "Singaporean Way of Life" that has come out of the different ethnic communities, and the deliberate campaign itself to construct a civil religion. We can indeed say that the government was promoting a civil religion, in the form of a National Ideology incorporating Confucian values.

We must next ask whether as a civil religion - and as an ideology - it does not also express the experiences and aspirations, the ideal and material needs and interests of certain groups. Behind the need for "Asian values", is there another agenda for the civil religion?

(iv) Of economic success and Confucian values

Since the late 1970s, one of the questions consistently brought up in international economic circles concerns the economic success of East Asia and South-East Asia's "newly industrializing countries". It revolves around the theme of whether the Confucian culture that is prevalent in nations like Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and of course, Singapore could in any way explain their fast economic development in the past few decades. Perhaps, trying to explain an economic event within the context of a culture is dangerous and even foolhardy! However, for our purposes, our short inquiry into the

relationship of culture and economy in Asia will have to start with Max Weber, who did pioneering work on this subject. In two studies, Weber traced the origin of capitalism to Protestantism, and provided a critique of Confucianism and its alleged role in retarding the industrialization and modernization of China.⁸¹

The rise of capitalism, according to Weber, was due directly to the ethic of the Puritans in the Calvinist movement. Profit-making was considered a religious duty and idleness a sin. Such an attitude was what was most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and was in a sense the fundamental basis of it. Weber felt that this social ethic was unique to the Puritans and was markedly missing among the people of historic China, India, Babylon, and the Middle Ages.⁸² If the pursuit of profit was a religious duty to the Puritans, it also meant they had to practice an ascetic life. On one hand, they had to work hard so that profit can be maximized for honouring God, but at the same time they had to minimize its use for themselves. There was to be a compulsion to "save", and not to needlessly "spend".

This capitalist way of profit-making was thus a rational one: it took into account the efficient

⁸¹Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: G.Allen & Unwin, 1930), and The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, trans. Hans H. Gerth (Glencoe, Il.: Free Press, 1951).

⁸²Weber, The Protestant Ethic..., p.54.

utilization of manpower, and the calculation of profits and losses. This kind of (modern) capitalism, Weber stressed, was different from all previous economic movements in three aspects - the rational organisation of free labour, the separation of business from the household, and rational book-keeping.⁸³

As for traditional China, Weber named two conditions as unfavourable to the rise of capitalism. The first was the Chinese socio-political structure which, to him, was a serious obstacle. The complicated monetary system, the lack of local autonomy of cities, the persistence of the guilds, there was no formal and independent legal order, the presence of a conservative kinship system, and the inhibiting and stifling effects of the imperial bureaucracy - these were all aspects of traditional Chinese society which prevented the emergence of entrepreneurs and contributed to economic stagnation.⁸⁴

The second condition was the Chinese exaltation of the "cultured man" as the highest Confucian ideal. Such a Confucian gentleman was supposed to value harmony between nature and men and had a disdain for acquisitiveness in profit-making. The Confucian gentleman, as a scholar official or as a member of the gentry, would regard landownership as a socially acceptable economic undertaking but would have no regard for commercial pursuits. Weber

⁸³Ibid., pp.21-22.

⁸⁴Weber, The Religion of China, Part 1.

felt that the Confucian ethic did not have a tension between nature and diety, or a demand from God that the people should work hard to make profits. Comparing the Chinese to the Puritans, he observed that the Chinese lacked the central, religiously determined, and rational method of life "which came from within and which was chracteristic of the classical Puritan. For the latter, economic success was not an ultimate goal" but indeed a means for serving God. Thus the Confucian gentleman was not any sort of "divine tool"; "in his adjustment to the world and his self-perfection he was an end unto himself, not a means for any functional end. This core of Confucian ethics rejected... training in economics for the pursuit of profit".⁸⁵ He concluded: "Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world; Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world".⁸⁶

All is not lost however; Weber also believed that any failure of capitalism to rise in China did not mean it was impossible for China to adopt capitalism. There were other aspects of Chinese culture such as early abolition of feudalism, freedom of migration, free choice of occupations, and the high value placed on education, which were favourable to the dvelopment of capitalism. The Chinese, then, "in all probability would be quite capable...of assimilating capitalism which has technically

⁸⁵Ibid., pp.243-244, 246.

⁸⁶Ibid., p.248.

and economically been fully developed in the modern culture area".⁸⁷ It must be noted, in passing, that Weber's ideas and theories on culture and economy have become the foundation of a contemporary sociological school to explain the process of modernization. Talcott Parsons, in particular, has elaborated on Weber's concepts, and in books such as *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) and *The Social System* (1951) has developed a comprehensive theory to describe and evaluate the cultural and economic achievements of nations. This "Weber-Parsons paradigm" has been widely accepted and adopted by scholars of social change, and of Asian/Oriental studies, with the idea that the main, distinctive feature of modern cultural and economic change throughout the world is a movement toward increasing rationality. This has been demonstrated by the historical experiences of the West, so, in other words, the West's rational model of cultural and economic change can be applied universally. Such a model has three features: it is aimed at achieving efficiency, it is facilitated by individualism and it is driven by dynamism.

To sum up the thoughts so far: there was the belief that in a setting where someone is more individualistic, expressive and assertive, where the market system works better and self-interest (in Adam Smith's understanding) predominates, then modernization from capitalism is possible. The kind of values usually considered Confucian

⁸⁷Ibid.

do not promote such modernization - or so it was thought.

By the 1970s however, many had begun to reconsider and even reverse their assumptions when faced with the economic success of East Asian countries. Herman Kahn, for example, was one of the first to link Confucian culture to such economic success: "Under current conditions the neo-Confucian cultures have many strengths and relatively few weaknesses. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the ethnic Chinese minorities in Malaysia and Thailand seem more adept at industrialization than the West" and the Confucian ethic "will result in all the neo-Confucian societies having at least potentially higher growth rates than other cultures".⁸⁸ In a similar vein, a much-cited report in The Economist commented at the time:

For the 200 years since the onset of the industrial revolution, the west has dominated the world. Today that dominance is threatened, not just by the Russians, who are anyway heirs, at least in part, to the western tradition; nor by the Arabs whose stranglehold will relax as the sands run dry; but more fundamentally by the East Asian heirs to Confucianism, who have so far provided the only real economic...challenges to the Euro-American culture.⁸⁹

And again these "post-Confucian east Asians" are identified as the Japanese, "Koreans from South Korea, Chinese from Taiwan, Singapore and Hongkong".⁹⁰ Japan has attracted

⁸⁸Herman Kahn, World Economic Development, 1979 and Beyond (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1979), pp.118, 122.

⁸⁹Roderick MacFarquhar, "The Post-Confucian Challenge" in The Economist, February 9, 1980, p.67.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp.67-68.

special mention because of the awareness that the country has undergone economic modernization for the longest time in Asia, and yet it remains uniquely distinguishable from the West. Two Japanese economists, in two separate books, have tracked the economic success of Japan and the "newly industrializing economies" directly to Confucian values. Michio Morishima defines Confucianism as "a religion which unites with the governing power in a state; acts as guardian of its legitimacy and whose role is to sanctify the lineage of the ruling tribe" and also as "an ideology providing religious justification for the position of those in power and upholding the status quo",⁹¹ and attributes Japan's success precisely to the working of this Japanese version of Confucianism. In his book he delineates the way in which ideology has been used during the course of Japan's history, and that the ideology of Confucianism has played a crucial role in helping direct (and restrict) the possibilities of day to day Japanese economic activities "to within the framework peculiar to that ideology".⁹²

To Harry Oshima, the social values of Confucian culture were rational, pragmatic and utilitarian, and as such more conducive to modern economic growth, than those of Hinduism or Mahayana Buddhism. This helped to explain the difference in the economic performance between East

⁹¹Michio Morishima, Why Has Japan 'Succeeded'? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.194, 196.

⁹²Ibid., p.201

Asia and South Asia. He also states that while Protestant ethics are the ethics of Western capitalism, "Confucian ethics may be said to be the philosophy of the Asian monsoon economy: harmony is seen as the key to social and political stability, and compromise, moderation, diligence, and cooperation as the means to achieve harmony".⁹³ Confucian cultures do not have to fear or be wary of science or modernization.

[The Asian NICs] need not be held back by the dearth of new technologies and can continue to import them to speed up growth. Institutions concerned with importing technologies have improved in past decades, and co-operation and participation are more common than individualism and adversarial relations. The work ethic in the NICs is quite strong as a heritage from Confucianism...Confucianism is based on human relations and has been less affected by the spread of scientific culture. Aspects of its teachings that extol learning, harmony, cooperation, order, and diligence may be strengthened if the demands of emerging new technology are consistent with these ideals.⁹⁴

Before going into what the "work ethic" or "Confucian ethics" might entail, we need to remember that East Asian societies are all different from each other. Japanese society is quite different from Korean, Korean society different from that of the Taiwanese, these three are different from that of Hong Kong and Singapore - and so on. Therefore, "it is inadvisable to assume that the Confucian ethic, or the type of entrepreneurial spirit it engenders,

⁹³Harry T. Oshima, Economic Growth in Monsoon Asia: A Comparative Survey (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1987), p.32.

⁹⁴Ibid., p.346.

is identical in each of the five areas", and yet it was determined "that some sort of underlying work ethic must be common to each case, and that such an ethic provided the ingredient necessary for economic development".⁹⁵

It would therefore be appropriate now to summarise what has been called "the post-Confucian hypothesis" before naming some of the values of this "post-Confucian" ethic.

It is essentially simple: both Japan and the newly industrialized countries of East Asia belong to the broad area of influence of Sinitic civilization, and there can be no doubt that Confucianism has been a very powerful force in all of them. The hypothesis is that a key variable in explaining the economic performance of these countries is Confucian ethics - or post-Confucian ethics, in the sense that the moral values in question are now relatively detached from the Confucian tradition proper and have become more widely diffused...Robert Bellah has coined... 'bourgeois Confucianism' to distinguish this from the 'high' Confucianism of the Mandarin elite of traditional China.⁹⁶

Berger is "strongly inclined to believe" that this "post-Confucian hypothesis" will be supported. "It is inconceivable to me that at least some of the Confucian-derived values intended by the hypothesis - a positive attitude to the affairs of this world, a sustained lifestyle of discipline and self-cultivation, respect for authority, frugality, an overriding concern for stable

⁹⁵Tu, op.cit., p.85; 169.

⁹⁶Peter L. Berger, "An East Asian Development Model?" in In Search of An East Asian Development Model, ed. Peter L. Berger and Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988), p.7.

family life - should not be relevant to the work ethic and the overall social attitudes of the region".⁹⁷

The features or values which have been named as important factors in successful economic development in East Asia include: "a very strong, achievement-oriented work ethic; a highly developed sense of collective solidarity, both within...and beyond the family; the enormous prestige of education,...and severe meritocratic norms and institutions, which, while egalitarian in design, serve to select out elites when they are at an early age";⁹⁸ "self-discipline, group loyalty, willingness to work hard, frugality and self-denial, and obedience to authority - in short, the values of the work ethic, and those presumed to be congenial to authoritarian political structures";⁹⁹ "the traditional virtues of hard work and frugality...close personal ties and respect for authority and one's elders";¹⁰⁰ "the primary emphasis on self-discipline...(which) is emphasized perhaps more in Chinese culture than any other cultures of the world...the emphasis on hard work, exalting it as a virtue to be conscientiously

⁹⁷Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁹⁸Ibid., p.5

⁹⁹Wm. Theodore de Bary, Confucianism as an Aspect of East Asian and World Civilizations (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), p.11.

¹⁰⁰Chang, op.cit., p.27

pursued".¹⁰¹

These values or virtues are thus part of the "post-Confucian hypothesis" or "the newly-emerging Confucian ethic". There is however more to the equation: this newly-emerging ethic has also contributed to a new kind of capitalism in East Asia. Such an ethic has been said to be the functional equivalent of the Puritan ethic and has also been described as basically compatible or comparable to the Western work ethic. Yet it can be seen to have a different structure and spiritual orientation. An excellent summing-up is the following:

This ethic, unlike the Puritanic ethic which stresses a consciousness of one's rights, entails duty-consciousness. It stresses the importance of social solidarity and finding one's niche in a particular group. This means understanding one's role in society with reference to a whole body of social conventions and practices. It is more of a harmonizing than a competitive model. It assigns great importance to the personal cultivation and discipline (especially the spiritual and psychological discipline) of the self. It stresses consensus formation, not through the imposition of a particular will upon the society at large but through the participation of a large segment of the group in a gradual process of mutual consultation. This requires and elicits a spirit of cooperation. It also stresses the importance of education, not so much in terms of the accumulation of knowledge as in terms of character-building and personality formation. It seeks to create a kind of fiduciary commitment to a larger and more lasting goal. Leadership in government is encouraged and considered crucial. At the same time, government can lead the people only if it is also moral, dynamic and creative. This particular ethic places a great emphasis on a sense of history,

¹⁰¹Wu Teh-Yao, "Chinese Traditional Values and Modernization" in Asian Values and Modernization, ed. Seah Chee-Meow (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977), p.48.

culture and tradition. It values wisdom gained and transmitted by experience over an accumulation of information...We are talking about a new Confucian ethic which is a response to the impact of the West. As a creative response, this new Confucian ethic has already integrated some of the values taken for granted as Western within its ethical structure. It does not oppose Western ideas of rights, individual dignity, autonomy, or competitiveness in the healthy and dynamic sense.¹⁰²

One could speculate that this kind of model reflects to a great degree the Singapore situation. The government may decry the effects of Westernization (as it is perceived) in Singapore, but such a reaction is also because there has been a combination of the values of the East and the West as part of, and as an adequate response to, the unique Singapore situation. Singapore has as part of its society the sense of the individual, of competitiveness, even the combined sense of self-interest, drive and rights consciousness. The government does not want to eliminate values like these if they help make up the kind of entrepreneurial spirit it wants - but it does not want "Asian" (Confucian) values forgotten either.

Keeping in mind then that the "post-Confucian hypothesis" or the "new Confucian ethic" are indeed hypotheses that are still being debated, we can go on to ask whether Confucian values have played an important part in Singapore's economic progress (and process), as they are supposed to have in the other Asian countries. Some Singaporean scholars are unsure, or reluctant to admit any

¹⁰²Tu, op.cit., pp.110-111.

such link. Thus, "it is very difficult to establish a direct causal relationship between Confucian values and the economic development of Singapore".¹⁰³ There have been other arguments for the proposition that noneconomic factors explain only a small part of economic success; that a good, coherent economic rationale ("good policies") can be provided for the East Asian countries' success; that such success (in three of the countries) came about only after these countries changed economic strategy (and the cultural factor was invariant); and that other countries with quite different cultures also were successful in achieving growth when they followed a similar strategy.¹⁰⁴ Another Singaporean response echoes this proposition: "Surely the conclusion to be drawn must be that the economic success achieved by Singapore during the past quarter of a century has been the result principally of economic policies and practices imported from elsewhere and influenced only marginally, if at all, by indigenous cultural factors".¹⁰⁵ Yet these same writers also admit, "in light of recent industrialization programmes in various parts of East Asia, it is sufficiently evident that certain Confucian emphases which Weber viewed as inhibiting

¹⁰³Wong and Wong, op.cit., p.7.

¹⁰⁴Gustav Papanek, "The New Asian Capitalism: An Economic Portrait" in In Search Of An East Asian..., .76.

¹⁰⁵The Editors, "Challenges of Success" in Management of Success: the Moulding of Modern Singapore ed.Kernal Singh Sandhu and Paul Wheatley (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), p.1096.

modernization, notably the educational, the disciplinary, and the organizational, can in appropriate circumstances function as factors contributing to economic development".¹⁰⁶ Why is there this reluctance to investigate whether such Confucian values, even if they are not the cause, could be more than "marginal" factors in Singapore's economic development?

John Wong and Aline Wong, while expressing their difficulties with any direct relationship between Confucian values and Singapore's economic development, do not feel at ease also with the dictum that for economic success, everything can be attributed to good economic policies and the people. "But good policies or strategies do not come about in an institutional vacuum, particularly in regards to the implementation of policies. Ideology, leadership, political structure, social ethos and political culture all play a part in the formulation and the implementation of an effective development policy...It should, however, be stressed that historically successful economic development has taken place under virtually all sorts of political regimes".¹⁰⁷ This last point has already been noted, but here it is linked with a role for culture. As MacFarquhar puts it, "Their political systems and complexions differ considerably...the significant coincidence is culture, the shared heritage of centuries of inculcation with

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p.1095.

¹⁰⁷Wong and Wong, op.cit., p.13.

The Wongs go on to develop their understanding of culture, politics, and government in relation to economic development:

What are really needed are effective government, competent public administration and dedicated political leadership committed to economic growth...In Singapore, the high commitment of its political leadership to economic growth is well-known. So is the high integrity and efficiency of its public administration which operates on meritocracy, with high-level positions manned by scholars with outstanding academic achievements. The overall political style and the general practice of government in Singapore would seem to conform to the Confucian high ideals of a benevolent government with a strong moral obligation to perform and to "deliver the goods" in terms of higher GNP increases or more export growth. In the circumstances of a small city-state, the prime principle of virtuous government must be, first and last, to ensure the economic survival of the state and to provide for the basic needs of its people. Is it too tenuous for us to interpret the development-oriented Singapore government as the modern equivalent to the Confucian principle of government by virtue?¹⁰⁹

The answer is "no"! Such an understanding of the workings of the Singapore government reaffirms its Confucian orientation, (and to repeat the earlier quote) Confucian "ideology, leadership, political structure, social ethos and political culture all play a part in the formulation and the implementation of an effective development policy".

As previously asked, why is there a reluctance to

¹⁰⁸MacFarquhar, op.cit., p.68.

¹⁰⁹Wong and Wong, op.cit., pp.13-14.

admit that Confucian values, if operative in East Asian nations with regard to economic development, may have something to do with that of Singapore too? One answer is simply that no government leader has openly or directly claimed that Singapore's success in economic development has been due solely to the working of Confucian culture. As mentioned earlier, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister, may have told the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention that in the Singapore situation special efforts had to be made to pass on core Confucian cultural values which if lost would lower Singapore's performance, but he went on to (carefully?) name the Chinese in South-East Asia as those who had succeeded because of their adherence to Confucian values. Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-religious, multi-cultural society; ethnic sensitivities need to be taken into account. To baldly assert that Singapore's economic success is due to Confucianism - even though Singapore is 75% Chinese - would imply that racial minorities - the Malays, Indians, Eurasians, Arabs, Europeans and others - have played no part or role in such development, and this is patently false. This would be clearly be politically unacceptable in a multi-racial society (and would also antagonise neighbours like Malaysia or Indonesia). It is also convenient to point to the government's "pragmatic" economic policies or strategies as the reason for success, made easier by the fact that the government itself has not been hesitant in talking about

such "pragmatism" as the basic characteristic of its economic philosophy.

But even in the "pragmatic" planning of a strategy of development, the government was all too aware of the importance and need for cultural values. The observation has been made that "obviously a society has to initiate a broad range of changes to accomodate economic modernization. How a society makes the necessary social changes while retaining its traditional values may determine the success or failure of a development effort".¹¹⁰ Also, "economic development is caused by a variety of factors, and culture is one central factor inexorably linked to the development process" and today Confucianism, even if only one force, continues to be a formidable cultural force shaping the life of the peoples in East Asia.¹¹¹ Two social scientists have summarised the PAP government's strategy of development, and Hartfield's observations about culture are echoed in it. The 'strategy's" first requirement is Strong Leadership and Organisation = Achievement of Goals, with the prerequisite of a continuing political stability in the region. We have seen that the PAP has provided what it deems Strong Leadership by its authoritarian, paternalistic style of

¹¹⁰Edward F. Hartfield, "The Divergent Economic Development of China and Japan" in Confucianism and Economic Development: An Oriental Alternative? ed. Hung-chao Tai (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, 1989), pp.106-107.

¹¹¹Ibid., p.108.

governing (and more will be said on this shortly).

Secondly, *"the leadership should inculcate in the population the right values and attitudes that are supportive of or may even quicken the pace of modernization and development"* (italics mine) and some of these values and attitudes include a sense of future-orientation, achievement-orientation, efficiency, social discipline, self-discipline, the willing acceptance of change as part of life and an inclination to hard work.¹¹² As has been pointed out already, the government has indeed been aware of "values" and has been busy "inculcating" them, then and now - as in the Shared Values project, with its pervasive Confucian influence.

Thirdly, the government has been carefully and consistently following the particular principle of not allowing the pace of development to slacken when initial success is achieved. The government continually stresses that complacency of any kind must be fought against to maintain growth. Thus the Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong in his National Day rally speech in August 1992 can tell Singaporeans that the going will get tougher because they are now competing in the super league of developed nations, but the future will be bright if, among other things, Singaporeans work together to stay competitive. According

¹¹²Chan Heng-Chee and Hans-Dieter Evers, "National Identity and Nation Building in Singapore" in Studies in Asian Sociology: Urban Society and Social Change eds. Peter S.J. Chen and Hans-Dieter Evers (Singapore : Chopmen Enterprises, 1978), p.124.

to Goh, there is no choice in this: there is to be no complacency. Similarly, Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew is reported to have said that to stay ahead, Singapore must be that much better, more productive and more capable. The headline for the report was "Shake Singaporeans out of complacency".¹¹³ And in his 1994 May Day message the Prime Minister was busy telling Singaporean workers that they will get higher wages in 1994, but he also warned that they must not forget the lessons of the 1985 recession, and must continue to be trained, to have their skills upgraded, to continue to work and compete as a team - and then "we can continue to improve our standard of living". Another warning then, to Singaporeans from their leaders: no resting on their laurels, even though Business Environment Risk Intelligence (BERI) has rated Singaporeans as the world's best labour force, and this is the 13th straight year that Singapore has topped that section of the BERI report.¹¹⁴

By such continual exhortations and unobtrusive encouragement, the government not just seeks to prevent complacency, but also is following the fourth aspect of their "strategy": "It is extremely important to create an atmosphere of confidence as success breeds success. Thus the spirit of dynamism and political stability must be

¹¹³The Straits Times Weekly Overseas Edition, January 9, 1993, p.7.

¹¹⁴The Straits Times Weekly Edition, May 21, 1994, p.15.

preserved", and if all develops as planned, then "with time, this development will be institutionalised" (the fifth aspect).¹¹⁵

"Development" and success has not just been institutionalised; one could say that the whole process of Singapore's continual and watchful struggle for political and economic survival has been institutionalised into the politics of survival. Such "politics" include a set of policies and strategies aimed at curbing domestic dissent (authoritarian rule; tight social control and laws) and promoting stability and industrial peace to attract much-needed foreign investment (trade unions curbed; multinational corporations welcomed) while instilling in the nation's different ethnic communities a sense of national identity.

As such, "this preoccupation with survival and the belief that economic development is the corner-stone of security and the best counter-insurgency strategy have motivated the government to tirelessly pursue economic development and relentlessly push its people toward excellence" and again, "As a goal setter, the PAP government has pushed the people of Singapore in furious pursuit of a new, economic rationale for Singapore's existence. *Economic development is seen as a necessary*

¹¹⁵Chan and Evers, op.cit., p.125.

condition for the survival and security of the nation"¹¹⁶(italics mine). A Confucian scholar has also commented: "It is clear that the leadership here is totally committed to the economic development of Singapore as a question of survival. Everyone here is inspired by this project. They recognize the necessity and choose to be a part of it".¹¹⁷ And this "seige mentality"/ ideology of survival came about because of historical reasons. Since the PAP did not come to power as the sole champion of Singapore independence, and as anti-colonial sentiment would simply have been inadequate for governmental authority, especially among a mainly immigrant population, "the government had little choice but to present its vision of a new nation in terms of economic progress".¹¹⁸

This is still true, nearly 30 years on. The ideology and politics of survival persists. And this is one reason for the paternalistic authoritarian style of government the PAP adopts for its running of Singapore. There is a summary of the general model of authoritarian (East Asia) governments which also fits Singapore well:

In East Asia power is monopolized by a relatively small elite, dissent is not easily tolerated, political controls tend to reinforce a dominant party or ruling group, and boundaries are set on

¹¹⁶Ow Chin-Hock, "The Role of Government in Economic Development: The Singapore Experience" in Singapore: Resources and Growth eds. Lim Chong-Yah and Peter J. Lloyd (Singapore : Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.233, 236.

¹¹⁷Tu, op.cit., pp.177-178.

¹¹⁸The Editors, "Challenges..." op.cit., p.1087.

press freedom - all of which add up to authoritarianism by any definition. Yet, there is another side to the East Asian governments. They tend to recognize merit, extol technocratic skills, encourage national development, and generally press for modernization and egalitarian economic development. Leaders cling to their rights of power, but they can be broadly supportive of all who contribute to national development, just as long as they are not also politically unruly and disruptive. In short, the systems are paternalistic...They are also authoritarian in that they are hypersensitive to any threat to their power and status.¹¹⁹

Many Singaporeans would indeed agree that the above quote is also a good description of the Singapore PAP government. The point about a government being "broadly supportive" is well echoed in a recent report of the Singapore Prime Minister observing that young Singaporeans today pursued career, credit card, car, condominium, and club membership (the five C's), unlike older generations who were content with "one wife, two children, three rooms and four wheels". There was nothing wrong with this, he said, "as long as the young kept the family unit strong, worked hard, and supported public policies underpinning Singapore's prosperity"¹²⁰- the same old necessary song.

Pye also summarizes the common characteristics of "The East Asian Political Model" in a "dozen boldly stated propositions" which reflects in most aspects "its Confucian roots". What is of interest to us are three "critical

¹¹⁹Lucian W. Pye, "The New Asian Capitalism: A Political Portrait" in In Search of An East Asian..., op.cit., p.83.

¹²⁰The Straits Times Weekly Edition, July 9, 1994, p.1.

features of the Confucian tradition which at one time impeded economic progress but which have endured and now seem to support the paternalistic authoritarianism that is compatible with East Asian capitalism".¹²¹ First is the strong ethical-moral basis of government in the Confucian tradition; the dimension of the Confucian sense of legitimacy that enables the East Asian governments to feel that they not only have the right to intervene in people's lives but that they have a definite obligation to do so if it can improve the people's condition - economic or otherwise. "The Confucian tradition had to be coupled with advances in economics as an intellectual discipline in order to produce the economic miracles of East Asia. The new mandarins had to be schooled in the wisdom of Western economic theories and practices".

Second is an elitist view of the sociopolitical order which justifies the existence of hierarchy and, related to it, meritocracy. "In recent times the idea of rule by an educated elite has meant the legitimization of technocrats in government. Those who rule know best what is good for everyone because they are the best trained and have the appropriate skills. In this tradition the common man should defer to his intellectual betters".

Thirdly, there is the Confucian stress on harmony, which when applied politically, means a demand for consensus and conformity. The reverse side of this is the

¹²¹Pye, op.cit., p.86.

belief that individualism is a manifestation of selfishness. This value of harmony promotes scorn for those who would disrupt the social order by dissent and by participating in oppositional activities. "Rulers are expected to preserve order, prevent social confusion, and thus keep in check any and all who are likely to disrupt the smooth flow of economic and social life. This valuing of harmony in Confucian political cultures places obstacles in the way of political critics, labor agitators, student rebels, and other challengers of the status quo".¹²²

We can compare the Singapore government with these three qualities just cited, and thus to remember and re-affirm that it is indeed a government run on Confucian lines. It may subscribe to an ideology of "pragmatism" and utilitarian "efficiency", but it also has cultural values closely linked to economic development. Thus, such already identified Confucian values as thrift, diligence, hard work, respect for educational achievement, avoidance of overt conflict in social relations, loyalty to authority and hierarchy, stress on order and harmony, self-discipline, and more, would be accepted by them. This is completely understandable when we look again at the Shared Values, and realise anew the similarities and Confucian parallels between the Shared Values, and those given as examples above. And more: it has previously been mentioned that these values are congenial to authoritarian political

¹²²Ibid., pp.86-87.

structures, and the same can be said of the Shared Values - the Values selected to make up the National Ideology of Singapore are those functional for Singaporeans living and working in an authoritarian capitalist state.

There may be no hard, irrefutable evidence, but it is surely reasonable to propose, from all the studies, reports and observations, that Confucian values do play a part in the economic success of East Asian countries and Singapore, especially when we consider that Confucianism is part of the ideological framework of the PAP government. We have also considered and discussed the Shared Values, and have seen Confucian cultural values enshrined in them (and thus, the National Ideology). Again, remembering that some of the reasons for a National Ideology was to bind Singaporeans together, with a distinct national identity and destiny, and the Values chosen were to help Singaporeans to prosper, we can go on to say that the motive for the Shared Values/ National Ideology is not just for nation-building but also for nation-prospering or nation-surviving. The Shared Values are to help in promoting continued economic growth. "Since Singaporeans share the same core values of hard work, thrift and sacrifice as the Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese, these values must be preserved in the form of a national ideology in order to ensure Singapore's continued prosperity and long-term survival".¹²³ As a National

¹²³Jon S.T. Quah, "National Values and Nation-Building: Defining the Problem" in In Search of Singapore's..., op.cit., p.1.

Ideology, it is supposed to be the standard and pattern for the proper living of Singaporeans as citizens; indeed it is, as Mr. Goh Chok Tong, Prime Minister of Singapore, has himself called it, "our way of life". To the PAP then, the National Ideology is to be Singapore's Way of Life. This, of course, has a resonance to how a civil religion can be defined, and if understood as a civil religion, the National Ideology obviously calls for the allegiance and devotion of Singaporean citizens to continue to work hard, put the nation first, so that the nation can survive and prosper, and achieve its goal (and proclaimed destiny) of being a significant, meaningful, and important "hub city" for the region, and for the world. In wanting to promote a civil religion in the form of a National ideology, the government is conscious that "a sense of identity derives from a shared awareness of a common heritage and is the pre-requisite of a sense of loyalty and commitment that holds a nation together and makes continuing progress possible. Without it, an independent nation cannot survive".¹²⁴

We should not be anxious, then, in trying to find in the Confucian values the "causes" of economic development. We can however expect to look for - and it would be a more satisfactory view to do so - these values as the "trigger" of development. In other words, Confucian values are considered as a factor that is a positive force for

¹²⁴Chang, op.cit., p.6.

development when the right set of structural conditions and economic policies are also present. This is thus to accept that the cultural factors could not act alone without other supporting political and economic conditions (with the knowledge also that it may be necessary to identify the kind of political and economic environment in which these cultural factors will be able to make economic activity dynamic and lively). Indeed, "the most outstanding feature of the modernization experience of East Asia's...Confucian societies is the acceptance of culture as a significant force shaping a human-oriented workforce in the service of industrialization. That may be the most important legacy of Confucianism for modern times".¹²⁵

Even if one is unwilling to accept any such "legacy" in the history and process of economic development in Asia, or specifically in Singapore, preferring instead to talk of "pragmatic" and "efficient", "wise" policies, one still cannot get away from the fact that the Singapore political leaders must have been aware of this "post-Confucian hypothesis"; that Confucian values have been linked with economic progress in the NIEs of Asia. In 1982 Dr. Goh Keng Swee, a former Deputy Prime Minister, did make such a connection with Confucian values to economic growth in the NIEs when he said, (and was duly reported in The Straits Times of February 4, 1982) "The economic growth of these countries...came about through a generation of people

¹²⁵Hartfield, op.cit., p.110.

exposed to the Confucian tradition. This tradition produced a people of a certain mould of character which made it possible for these countries to achieve spectacular economic growth". One may choose to believe in the minimal or marginal effects of such cultural factors then, but the point for us now is that the Singapore government, being a "Confucian" one, would have no difficulty in presently accepting the socializing or social-discipline-enforcing benefits of Confucian values in the pursuit of economic goals, and as has been argued, is in fact through the Shared Values/National Ideology using them now precisely to produce "a people of a certain mould of character...to achieve spectacular economic growth"!

"Survival" does not just mean the nation's; it extends to the PAP government too. In being aware of the common sentiment shown by Singaporeans toward this issue of "national survival", the PAP government would consider it ideologically sound to link, and push, "national survival" with "economic success" as part of the fate and destiny of Singapore. Singaporeans (as with other Asians) do take their nation's survival as a real problem facing their society (especially when constantly reminded of how small, and thus vulnerable, Singapore is), particularly in the face of challenges presented by Western societies - culturally, economically, or otherwise. These attitudes may thus have influence in pushing people to work harder under the National Ideology toward the goals of national

strength, survival and success - something the government is all too happy to encourage, since it too will survive if the fostered dependency on it by the people can be answered with a sustained delivery of "the goods".

Indeed, it is this sense of dependency which makes the Confucian tradition of paternalistic authority so effective in working for the collective goal of national economic development. Yet, that same spirit of dependency can become an angry explosive force when authority has failed to provide the expected benefits. Thus, as long as economic progress continues, the East Asian political systems will operate well with their quasi-authoritarian institutions, but disappointment over the expected benefits from governments can produce explosive reactions against the failure of paternalistic authority. The ultimate safety valve for the East Asian system is...mutual respect and binding ties between paternalistic leaders and dependent, but articulate, constituents.¹²⁶

One could be cynical and say that the Singapore government, being always "pragmatic" over its "survival", had already prepared for such a situation by having such Shared Values as regard for the family, harmony and consensus! Yet, even if the government seems to give the impression that economic success is the "be-all" and "end-all" for the nation, "articulate" voices have been heard wondering if this should be so, either for the nation or the individual. "There are those who look forward to a future in which economic considerations will serve as the engine of the vehicle of development rather than its driver; or, in more formal terms, that the nexus of

¹²⁶Pye, op.cit., p.97.

adaptive (economic) interactions will indeed function as a subsystem of society rather than as a total action system".¹²⁷ In other words, that the state should move away from claiming legitimacy on 'social eudaemonic' grounds - "seeking legitimacy through acts of rule that assist the economic system in producing an ever-increasing flow of goods and services for the consumer-citizen".¹²⁸ And a Confucian scholar adds a wistful comment to the necessity of economic development: "Were the (Singapore) leadership to show that in addition to economic success we need to succeed in terms of the moral quality of our characters, this could be an extremely powerful incentive for society as a whole".¹²⁹ The government would predictably say that there can be no let up and no complacency in such economic efforts, but it is interesting to note what the Singapore Prime Minister recently said of the "National Challenge" (the latest slogan) - sustaining Singapore's prosperity and "building a gracious society".¹³⁰ Perhaps Professor Tu's wish is beginning to come true after all.

But for now, we end this chapter by reaffirming that the Singapore government was promoting a civil religion in the form of a National Ideology which incorporated Confucian values, to enhance and continue economic growth;

¹²⁷The Editors, "Challenges of Success", op.cit., p.1106.

¹²⁸Thompson, op.cit., p.60.

¹²⁹Tu, op.cit., pp.177-178.

¹³⁰The Straits Times Weekly Edition, June 11, 1994, p.13.

that the Confucian values enshrined as the Shared Values were to reinforce and facilitate the economic growth-supporting forces now in progress, which are part of the modernization process underway.

CHAPTER IV

ANY ROLE FOR THE CHURCH?

In seeking to consider what role, if any, the Church in Singapore has with regard to a civil religion and a national ideology, or in asking how the Church can contribute, and on what terms, to the process of nation-building, it would be instructive to first look at two recent additions to the ongoing "campaigns" to uphold and preserve "values" which have been deemed essential for the nation's health by the government.

A. "Family Values"

The first of the two deals with (again) "Family Values". On February 5, 1994 Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi, the Acting Minister for Community Development, announced five "core values" - love, care and concern; mutual respect; filial piety; commitment; and responsibility - which were what Singaporeans had apparently stated they needed most to keep families intact. This conclusion was drawn by a national committee based on ideas given by 84 individuals and organisations since September 1993. Furthermore, Singaporeans themselves could read the first draft of the document, entitled "Singapore's Family Values", later the same month, after which public forums would be held, presumably for the process of "consultation".

However, it is surely no coincidence that on the

previous day, February 4, 1994, the Health Minister George Yeo was reported as saying that Singaporeans' respect for the family and reverence of elders must stay no matter how quickly the world changes. He warned that Singapore must not go the way of the West where the family system had collapsed and old people became lonely as the young were too busy and self-absorbed. "Whatever we do in Singapore, we must never undermine the family and the reverence of elders. The two are related". Indeed, reverence of elders was the glue that held families together.¹

And thus the usual process began. In mid-April 1994 the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong himself affirmed that Singaporeans generally had no quarrel with the five family values and were even now focusing on how best to transmit them, and that it was indeed necessary to transmit these values through schools and families.

After due feedback from certain sectors of the public had been gathered, and irregardless of whether the feedback was truly representative of the public at large or not, the inevitable revised "final list" of "five key Singapore Family Values" was then announced: Love, Care and Concern; Mutual Respect; Filial Responsibility; Commitment; and Communication. Mr. Abdullah Tarmugi came back on-stage to call this list "a people's document" because of the enthusiastic support received and the contributions and views which had come in from all quarters and in different

¹The Straits Times Weekly Edition, February 12, 1994, p.7.

languages. The challenge now, he said, was to promote the values and translate them into a living document, and to make them a part of everyday life.

To this end then, mosques, churches, temples and family service centres which ran pre-marriage courses and family life education programmes could incorporate the family values into their programmes. So could the National Trade Union Congress, grassroot bodies and employers who organised family outings, and schools and child-care centres, which taught moral education and civics. In other words, all civic, community, voluntary and commercial organisations were to work with the Government on new projects to promote the "family values", and they were assured "In the process, the importance of family values is brought out in a manner that is fun and without coercion".²

"Fun" and a lack of "coercion" may not exactly be in mind when one considers the next development (or on-going stage?) in this "Family Values" campaign. In late May 1994 Nominated Member of Parliament Walter Woon introduced a Private Member's Bill, which was to be called the Maintenance of Parents Bill. The Bill allows a parent unable to support himself adequately to go to the courts to claim maintenance from one or more of his children - including step-children, adopted or even illegitimate children. Also, a family member, relative, care-giver, or any other person may apply for the order on the parent's

²The Straits Times Weekly Edition, June 4, 1994, p.2.

behalf, so long as consent is thus given. The child being sued for maintenance may also name others, such as siblings, who may also be liable to support the parent. Those who ignore a court maintenance order can expect to face penalties such as a fine of up to S\$1,000 or a jail term of up to a year, or both! In other words, as the editorial of The Straits Times of May 27, 1994 trenchantly puts it, "Be filial or be sued"!

It is not necessary here to go into too much detail over the responses - both for and against - to this proposed piece of legislation. Those against essentially object that such a law is "unAsian", (the implication of course that being Asian is synonymous with being filial), or that love for one's parents cannot be legislated and that this law will not promote filial piety. It was considered an affront to the family values and the strong sense of filial piety Singaporeans presumably upheld. Those for the proposal argue that the Bill is not intended to promote filial piety or love - it is simply a matter-of-fact acknowledgement that in extreme cases, neither filial piety or love exists. If children do not take care of their own parents, who will? Harsh words abound - Walter Woon himself has been criticised as "ignorant" by traditionalists outraged at the possible use of legislation in such matters, but he has replied that the Bill is not an indictment of Singaporean youth. Rather more bluntly, he comments "We are fooling ourselves if we think we have a

perfect Confucian society where all children look after their parents". Stressing that most people do not need such protection, there is still however "the recalcitrant, small minority that cannot be counted on to do what is right".³ Thus the (usual, expected?) need for, and answer in, preventive legislation.

The Singapore Parliament on Wednesday, July 27, 1994 backed the Bill with 50 MPs voting to send it to a Select Committee, and 11 opposing it. After some fine-tuning, it will be sent back to Parliament for a third and final reading.

What significance is there in all this? On one level it may well be that, in the face of material wealth, consumerism, and individualism (the results of its own successful policies), the Government does want to hold up "traditional" concepts such as family values and filial piety to counteract what it fears is the erosion of a properly well-behaved "Asian" (Confucian) moral society. On the other hand, let us remember that the concept of the loyal, obedient family with filial piety being demonstrated towards the elders is a central Confucianist tenet. Furthermore, this tenet is one of the Shared Values - **Family as the basic unit of society** - which make up the National Ideology, and thus the civil religion of Singapore. One can naturally ask then, why pick out something that had already been stressed, elaborated, and

³The Guardian, July 29, 1994, p.10.

discussed as part of a National Ideology, and give it a full-scale campaign on its own? Does it have anything to do with the civil religion - for example, promoting subtly the civil religion (or aspects of it) through "family values"?

Singapore may be a Confucian society, albeit an Asian multicultural, multiracial one, but in such a society cooperation among different groups is made possible by the fact that they are all based on the family model. Also, the "Asian" values that we have encountered so many times in this thesis - self-discipline, group loyalty, self-denial, obedience to authority, willingness to work hard, etc., - are the basic values of a Confucian family ethic which, seen in a Singaporean setting, has cut across classes, and has adapted to the local economic, social and political system. A properly trained member of a Confucian culture will precisely be hardworking, responsible, skilful, etc., in helping the group (extended family, community, or company) cohere together and prosper together. No wonder then the constant exhortation to traditional Asian values, family or otherwise. The Singaporean Government has confirmed that efforts to promote filial piety will continue, through campaigns or legislature if necessary. Any reading with an ideological tinge reminds one of, and affirms the conclusion "that filial piety fostered habits of disciplined subordination and acceptance of authority which could be applied to the factory and the nation".⁴

⁴MacFarquhar, op.cit., p.70.

It all comes together in the Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong's National Day Rally speech, which stressed the theme of moral values being the foundation of a vibrant society, and more especially traditional moral and family values as the ones for Singapore. Yes, the country was doing well economically, and would be so for the next 5 to 10 years, but Mr. Goh felt correct economic policies were not enough for continued success. Equally important and crucial, he said, were "non-economic factors - a sense of community and nationhood, a disciplined and hardworking people, strong moral values and family ties". All this economic success could thus be unravelled if traditional values were not strong. "The type of society we are determines how we perform. It is not simply materialism and pursuit of individual rewards which drive Singapore forward, but more important, it is the sense of idealism and service, born out of a feeling of social solidarity and national identification".⁵ Or, in the context of what we are discussing in this thesis, we might say that what drives Singaporeans forward (according to the Prime Minister) should be the idealistic regard and devotion for the nation which results in disciplined and committed service to the nation, and what creates this devotion is the kind of feeling of social cohesion and nationalism fostered by the civil religion in the form of these "values" - "traditional", "family" or "Shared". And, as if to confirm

⁵The Straits Times Weekly Edition, August 27, 1994, p.1.

our point that Asian or Confucian values are to strengthen the moral fibre of the society for economic ends, Mr. Goh also stated (quoted in Britain's Daily Mail but not in The Straits Times), "Our institutions and basic policies are in place to sustain high economic growth. But if we lose our traditional values, our family strength and cohesion, we will lose our vibrancy and decline. *This is the intangible factor in the success of East Asian economies*" (italics mine).⁶

He concludes, "These values are tried and tested, have held us together, and propelled us forward. We must keep them as the bedrock values of our society for the next century". This has a familiar ring indeed, and is quite similar to the exhortations employed by Mr. Goh when he first spoke out on the need for Asian values at the beginning of the whole Shared Values/National Ideology - and Civil Religion - campaign, as described in Chapter II. In other words, there is a certain symmetry between this current campaign for "Family Values" and legislated filial piety, and the earlier "Shared Values" one. It is not just in subject matter - that "Family Values" are part of the "Shared Values" themselves, but also in the manner in which both campaigns were touted: a social problem is suddenly brought to the attention of the public, "discussion" and "debate" takes place in parliament and through the media,

⁶Daily Mail, August 22, 1994, p.11.

"consensus" is apparently reached, and legislature is brought about to solve the "problem" in the way the Government has determined. And because this is so, one is led to ask whether this latest campaign does not also have a deeper ideological agenda - one, like the "Shared Values" campaign, with the ultimate economic goals, or destiny, of Singapore in mind.

The answer, I believe, is yes. The "Family Values" campaign is an attempt by the PAP to complement the Shared Values - and as such, to promote acceptance of the National Ideology and civil religion. Family Values writ small may apply well to the home, but Family Values writ large carry through to the nation. As noted, this campaign carried great similarities to the original "Shared Values" one, which we have seen formed the foundation of the civil religion. Here too, the Family Values cited - love, care and concern, commitment, responsibility, etc. take on a different hue when applied to valuing the nation, or showing filial piety, and thus obedience and devotion, to it. And if the Family Values are part of the Shared Values which make up the civil religion, then this new campaign has the same function of hammering home the attitudes, attributes and behaviour patterns which puts the nation first in the name of love, for its economic well-being. The Prime Minister has more or less admitted above that the loss of these traditional values, whether they be called Asian, Shared, or Family will lead to a decline in economic

growth (and thus a lessening of the influence of the civil religion), and therefore, a loss of "love" or "respect" for the country. National pride will suffer, the nation may slowly stop being admired - or worshipped - for coming up with the goods all the time, the sacred nature of the society that has so far convinced people to be willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the larger society; has persuaded people to do that which they might not want to do, in the name of the country, may start to be questioned - and nationalism may suffer. That must not be allowed by any means. And so a civil religion is rushed into the breach.

How have the churches and Christians in Singapore responded to this new campaign? We do not yet know, for nothing has been reported or printed yet regarding such response.⁷ It may well be that the Church has easily and simply accepted the role given to it by the Government - to "incorporate the family values into their programmes"; after all the Church as an institution is supposed to promote personal, spiritual and moral values, doesn't it? And so if the churches obediently carry out this directive, "family values" are inculcated which, on a deeper unconscious level (remembering how much the family model is ingrained as an archetype in Asian cultures, as with those

⁷One indeed has to be patient for official statements to be issued to get any inkling of what the Churches' position may be, on any subject. It is of no use asking wary spokespersons for views if such views are to be "off the record" or "not to be quoted".

in Singapore) trains one to be loyal and obedient and receptive to the demands of the "paternal" state. Looked at this way, the Church finds itself in the position of actually promoting a civil religion on behalf of the Government, without the discernment that it may be a poisoned chalice.

Returning to the Shared Values/National Ideology campaign - was there response with regard to the role that the Church can play in the examination or promotion of it? Again, there seems to be indifference on the part of Christians to the whole issue. Any representation would appear to have been made or submitted to the Government during the "debate/discussion" stage of the campaign, and tacit agreement seems to have been given concerning the validity of the campaign or the importance of the Shared Values. Only in one article in Impact, the leading Singapore Christian evangelical magazine, does a writer, a lawyer and State Counsel, seem to raise some questions concerning the aim or validity of the Shared Values campaign. He comments that the Shared Values have been acknowledged as not "writ large on tablet, unchangeable for all time" but that some may be jettisoned and new ones added to meet changing needs. "Such pragmatism reinforces the notion that these values are merely instrumental in achieving some other end in mind". Stating that the "ephemeral quality" of some of the values have been acknowledged, he feels "it would be difficult for people to

be imbued with any real sense of conviction when it comes to their transmission. And when, rightly or wrongly, the values are perceived to be politically motivated, the result is cynicism".⁸ In other words, are such values truly from a community's cultural soul, or are they just imposed on a community in the guise of Asian-ness?

If, on the other hand, the Shared Values are but manifestations of a deeply held belief in our basic humanity, the need to respect the individual and recognise his inherent dignity, the need for a community comprising diverse racial groups who by dint of historical accidents now find themselves having to search for a national identity and to shape its own ethos, to have regard for each other's concerns and aspirations, the likelihood of these shared values being assimilated into the national psyche would be better. Only when these values are "internalised" and manifested in everyday social relationships would they attain the desired degree of permanence; mere propagation will not succeed in so doing. The strength of these values will lie in their soundness - historical, philosophical, social and moral - not just in their expediency.⁹

If the Singapore Government is promoting a civil religion through a National Ideology incorporating the Shared Values to ensure the desired end of prosperity for Singapore, then "expediency" will not get in the way. After making his point, Foo however goes on to comment that the identification and transmission of the Shared Values is "a laudable attempt to unite Singaporeans of different races, religions and cultural traditions and to maintain peace and

⁸Foo Kim Boon, "Shared Values: Does It Matter What You Value If What You Value Doesn't Matter?" in Impact, April-May 1991, p.8.

⁹Ibid., pp.8-9.

stability so that the future well-being of all Singaporeans can be safeguarded". Or we can put it another way: it is a laudable attempt to unite all Singaporeans into a love of, and devotion to nationalism; to putting the nation first above one's race, religion or culture so that the economic well-being of Singapore - its destiny - will survive. Such is the civil religion. And judging from these two campaigns alone, it seems to be surviving well. A factor surely must be the churches' apparent inability (or reluctance) to look beyond the surface of anything that is presented to it by the Government, and being happy with whatever agenda is set for them by the Government. A good example of this "reaction"-based response in place of a grappling with the underlying ideological issues can be seen in the reaction to the "Religious Harmony Maintenance Act".

B. "Religious Harmony", Politics and Religion

We turn now to the campaign for the maintenance of religious harmony which formally began with the publishing of A White Paper presented to Parliament on 26 December 1989. In the process we will again note the response of the churches to the issues raised in this campaign which included that of religion and politics.

After the White Paper was presented, three weeks later on 15 January 1990 the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill was read in Parliament for the first time. According to it, the Bill seeks to protect inter-religious harmony

and separate religion and politics.

Its provisions state that religious leaders and members of religious groups who threaten Singapore's religious harmony by what they say or do can be served with prohibition orders. These people are defined as those who:

- cause feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility or prejudice the maintenance of inter-religious harmony;
- carry out activities to promote a political cause, or a cause of any political party while, or under the guise of, propagating or practising any religious belief;
- carry out subversive activities under the guise of propagating or practising any religious belief; or
- excite disaffection against the President or the Government of Singapore.

The Home Affairs Minister can thus serve a prohibition order on any priest, monk, pastor, imam, elder, office-bearer, or anyone in a position of authority in any religious group or institution, or indeed any member of the group deemed guilty of breaking any of the injunctions listed above. (Cases and examples of what the government has called the mixing of religion and politics will be given in p.236 and following of this chapter).

So far the Religious Harmony legislation has not been used against any person or group. The consequences however, if a prohibition order has been issued, are clear and detailed. Once served with an order, the person cannot, without the minister's prior permission:

- address any congregation, parish or group of worshippers or members of any religious group or institution on any subject, topic or theme which may be specified in the order;
- print, publish, edit, distribute or in any way assist or contribute to any publication produced by that religious group;
- hold office in an editorial board or a committee of a publication of that religious group.

Penalties are, as expected, harsh. Those who violate the prohibition orders can be fined up to S\$10,000 or jailed up to two years, or both. A second or subsequent offence will cost the offender a fine of up to S\$20,000 or up to three years jail - or both.

What may be deemed a measure of "check and balance" comes in the provision for the setting up of a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony, to advise the minister whenever prohibition orders are issued, and also on other matters felt to be affecting religious harmony. To complete the pre-emptive strike, all orders and decisions of the minister and recommendations of the council will be final and cannot be questioned by any court.

Parliament Select Committee hearings were then held, beginning on September 20, 1990, where it was duly reported by The Straits Times the following day that the Bill received "firm support" and that it was "a welcome preventive measure to deal with aggressive

proselytisation". The hearings also saw a newly tabled proposal to have the elected President of Singapore, acting with the Presidential Council, having the power to overturn the minister's decision to issue such Prohibition Orders. This, it was suggested, was an additional "check". although the elected President entered the picture only after the Prohibition Order had been issued.

The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act 1990 came into effect in March 1992. The first Presidential Council for Religious Harmony, headed by a former Chief Justice, was appointed by the President of Singapore on August 1, 1992. The nine-man council included six representatives of the major religions (Buddhist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, and Sikh), and two others who were social/community leaders.

Like the proposed legislation for filial piety, religious harmony is now to be enforced by the Act. If one were to ask what "harmony" meant, then page 4 of the White Paper on "Maintenance of Religious Harmony" gives an answer: "Two vital conditions must therefore be observed to maintain harmony. Firstly, followers of the different religions must exercise moderation and tolerance, and do nothing to cause religious enmity or hatred. Secondly, religion and politics must be kept rigorously separated". The second is clear: do not mix religion and politics. The first, however, becomes distinct when one remembers the afore-mentioned "aggressive proselytisation", and notes

what Hindu leaders at the Select Committee Hearing stated: that they welcomed laws to protect religious harmony because their small community was constantly threatened by the aggressive conversion tactics of other religions. One example given by them left no doubt that Christianity was one of the "aggressive religions". The Act will thus ensure that the "Hindu community will be protected from groups out to convert it".¹⁰ In other words, the first "condition" simply means: do not try to convert those already in a different religion.

"Tolerance" is thus demonstrated simply by leaving each other religious group alone. The role of the religious groups, according to the "two vital conditions" above, would just be to retreat into their individual spiritual ghettos and seemingly have nothing to do with things outside their particular religious sphere - including politics. But others assure us such an understanding of "tolerance" and "harmony" is necessary: "In short, understanding, tolerance and harmony between the different races and religions in Singapore is a *sine qua non* for its survival as a nation. Singapore's rapid economic growth...has been the result of its political stability, which can be attributed in turn to the absence of racial or religious conflict during the last 20 years".¹¹

This constant factor of Singapore's economic growth

¹⁰The Straits Times, September 21, 1990, p.26.

¹¹Quah, "Searching for Singapore's...", op.cit., p.98.

helps one read anew the provisions of the Religious Harmony Act. If religious harmony is needed for the country to be united, cohesive and peaceful enough for economic progress to take place, then this Act is also serving the cause of the civil religion. If Singapore's economic survival as a nation can be at stake, then it could be counted as "subversive" for any group to raise questions concerning (for example) the influence or power of multinational corporations in Singapore's economy, or the sort of wages being paid to workers or labourers, or of how "guest workers" from other countries are treated and used. In other words, it would be subversive to raise any questions that would threaten the economic success, and thus undermine the nationalism of the country. Religions such as Christianity or Islam which not just have a "mission" to evangelise or proselytise, but are also "socially concerned" (meaning being politically aware) would seem to be targeted by such an Act. One recalls the official disapproval (and clamping down) on the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to provide care and facilities for runaway and abused Filipino maids, and the "Marxist conspiracy" in 1987 which involved again Catholic social workers. Indeed, one can postulate that the Shared Values Bill and the Religious Harmony Bill should be read and understood in conjunction with each other, and that they are part of the PAP Government's response to religious revivalism in Singapore, and to the fear that growing economic

inequalities in Singapore may lead to concepts such as liberation theology being espoused (and perhaps, even accepted) in Singapore society.

Whether or not the churches or their leaders would believe or admit that the Act may have been partly directed at them, there was no holding back the reservations over the legislation. It would be instructive here to look at the views expressed, not just on the Bill when first proposed, but also on the question of religion and politics. As church leaders, their views would be fairly representative of the Church in Singapore as a whole.

Shortly after the Bill was first read in Parliament, the Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore (consisting of more than 200 Protestant churches and para-church organisations) organised a forum to reflect on the Religious Harmony Bill. It was held on February 6, 1990 and attracted over 400 participants. Concern was voiced by them over the following issues:

- the need for such a Bill as existing legislation, such as the Internal Security Act or the Penal Code, already enabled the Government to deal with those deemed to threaten religious harmony;
- the possibility of the Bill actually accentuating religious sensitivities;
- the near absolute powers given to the minister to decide who would be regarded as mixing religion with politics or causing religious disharmony;

- the difficulty of interpreting phrases in the proposed law such as "causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility" and "prejudicing the maintenance of harmony", which might limit the scope for evangelisation; and
- the difference in views between what churches might see as social issues but which the Government deemed as political in nature.¹²

The responses seem to reveal a Church which feels itself under threat. The issues raised could be summarised in three questions: (1) Will the Minister of Home Affairs use his wide-ranging "unfettered" powers to stifle preachers and religious bodies the Government deems undesirable? (2) Are there safeguards to ensure that evangelisation can still be carried out? (3) Can the Church steer clear of politics? Reportedly the sole speaker unreservedly in favour of the Bill was a Member of Parliament, Dr. John Chen who was also an elder in a local Presbyterian Church. He stated that, as guaranteed under the Constitution, religious groups could continue to proselytise. As for politics, religious groups could still take a position on government policies as long as these were issues of moral concern and conscience. He went on, "I do not believe that it is the business of the church to be involved in the political system and to try and bring down the Government. But it is the responsibility of the church to teach its members how to lead their lives in accordance

¹²The Straits Times, February 8, 1990, p.18.

with the teachings of the Bible in an environment governed by secular law". Apparently to submit to such "law" with nothing from the Bible to say about society? Others were more forthright. Dr. Choong Chee Pang, then principal of Trinity Theological College (and in August 1992 appointed to the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony) opined that it all depended on the nature of the political activity. "If the Government is blatantly corrupt, totalitarian, oppressive, is it not the duty of a responsible citizen, regardless of religious conviction, to organise as many subversive activities with the aim of overthrowing such a regime?" (One remembers that the Confucian "Mandate of Heaven" carries a similar thought). Dr. Choong also drew from the Bible to show that Christianity was a holistic faith which touched on all aspects of life, including politics. He said that the Church had been grappling with the issue of separating religion from politics without total success. Mr. Francis Lee, a lawyer and lay leader of a Baptist Church, commended the good intentions behind the Bill, but felt there were not enough checks on the minister's powers. He said he agreed with the separation between Church and State, but there were also areas where the people's welfare covered both the religious and political arena. Keeping politics completely out of religion might thus limit the scope of Christian social responsibility. "Christian social responsibility...cannot be merely concerned with providing

social services to relieve human suffering, or promote philanthropic activity, or minister to individual needs or carry out works of mercy. It must also concern itself with the causes of human suffering, political and economic activity broadly defined, the transformation of structures in society and the quest for justice".

A month earlier The Straits Times Political Desk had canvassed 20 religious leaders for their views on the White Paper. 13 of them, including Roman Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu and Sikh leaders, had replied, with most indicating that the proposed laws would (significantly?) not affect the way they practised or spread their faith. The strongest support for the new laws came from Buddhist and Hindu leaders, who welcomed the changes wholeheartedly, presumably because they would help curb over-zealous and thus, offensive evangelists with their aggressive conversion tactics. Similarly, the Mufti of Singapore, the Muslim religious authority, pointed to the White Paper as saying that some Christian groups were particularly "aggressive", and felt that the new laws might help to avoid clashes between Christians and Muslims over the issue of conversion.

The response of the Roman Catholic Archbishop Gregory Yong was specific and detailed. He started by saying that the purpose of the legislation was "entirely praiseworthy", and it was "good to see the Government's concern about preserving and fostering inter-religious harmony". He

assured that Catholics were well aware of Singapore being multi-religious and multi-racial, and that for harmony to prevail, they must be sensitive to the religious beliefs, practices and cultural heritage of others. In view of the nature of Singaporean society then, "it is clear that the right of any religion to propagate its beliefs must be exercised with great prudence and restraint". The Catholic Church, he stressed, did not approve of aggressive proselytisation. He also felt it was "regrettable" that legislation was needed to prevent people from causing feelings of hatred or hostility towards those belonging to other religions.

One might feel, so far, that these are all sincere if necessary disclaimers. But the Archbishop also went on to deal with the question of whether religion and politics can really be kept strictly apart. He - and the Muslim Mufti - both called for a clearer definition of "politics" because the separation of politics and religion was a complex and problematic proposal which would cause confusion if a careful definition was not available.

Thus, if defined narrowly to mean party politics, it was acceptable to say that, in Singapore, no religion should espouse the cause of any political party and politics should be left to the layman, including lay Catholics. But if politics meant "the study and practice of public affairs", it was similar to religion in that it affected the whole of human life. "To say that religion and

politics can be separated is, at best, an ambiguous statement". The Archbishop noted the Government's distinction between the right of a religious leader to speak as a private citizen and as a religious leader, and that it would be wrong for him to use his position to foist his personal political or social views on his fellow-believers.

"However, when Government policies have a bearing on faith and morals, then the religious leader has a right and duty to teach his co-religionists the stand they have to take according to the authentic and authoritative teaching of their religion". Archbishop Yong felt this was where confusion could arise. It was not sufficient to say that the state was autonomous in secular matters and religion was autonomous in religious matters. "There can often be an overlap between the secular and the religious. In such cases, the religious leader cannot be accused of going beyond his competence in speaking on the moral and religious overtones of what might appear to be a purely secular matter. Just as the State shows its concern about inter-religious harmony because of its political implications, so religion must show its concerns about 'secular' Government policies when there are moral and religious implications".

The Archbishop also showed awareness of the often too-easy linkage between the ruling party and the country. He said that while "loyalty to the nation is not to be

identified with loyalty to the Government", it would be "quite wrong to brand as disloyal or unpatriotic those who oppose some of the decisions of the Government of the day...It is possible for a person to be a great critic of the Government and a great patriot". He pointed out that the Government had stated in the White Paper that it did not claim that its policies were always right. Therefore, "there must be room for criticism and dissent".

His conclusion, accomodating yet not totally accepting the Government line, is that "as far as the Catholic Church is concerned, religious leaders, whether bishops or priests, may not use the pulpit to voice their own personal dissatisfaction with Government policies, except in so far as these affect Catholic teaching on faith or morals".¹³ One could interpret this as a message to his bishops and priests to know and improve their theology; use good theology to highlight bad policies. Criticism and dissent of the State is not necessarily forbidden; theologise well so that in the marketplace of ideas, yours and the Church's will be taken seriously. Whether the Government will accept or endorse this churchly view is open to debate of course.

Christians in Singapore have always been aware and conscious of the consequences of dissent and disagreement, when received badly by the Government. In May 1987, the Government detained 16 persons under the Internal Security Act, charging that they were involved in what the PAP

¹³The Straits Times, January 11, 1990, p.20.

called a "Marxist conspiracy" to subvert the state. A further six were detained the following month. The detainees were not allowed trials, and no specific charges were brought against them. 13 of them were Roman Catholic Church workers involved in programmes to help foreign workers (for instance, Filipino maids) or to raise social issues in the Catholic community through avenues like the Catholic News, the Church's newsletter, which often presented critical views on local policy. Others were members of a drama group, the Law Society, student organisations and a political party. To the Government however, these people had "infiltrated" these organisations and groups to propagate Marxist and leftist ideas. Vincent Cheng, the alleged "ring-leader" of the group detained, later confessed to the Government charges on national television, and also implicated four Catholic priests in a conspiracy to use the Church to advance communist interests. (In September 1989 however, Cheng repudiated his televised "confession", claiming that it had been made under duress). The four priests were later barred from preaching or from having any contact with the Catholic organisations involved. Fearful of arrest, they left Singapore. By the end of 1987, twenty one persons out of the group detained had been released - only Cheng was still in prison. In April 1988, eight of those released asserted their innocence and alleged they were ill-treated during their detention. They were promptly rearrested, and they

then reaffirmed the truth of their original statements.

Another example was in December 1987 when the Christian Conference of Asia, a regional Protestant organisation which represented 93 denominations in 17 countries, had its offices in Singapore closed down, and the organisation itself was expelled from the country. A Singapore Government statement said that the CCA "had used Singapore as a base to promote political causes in other countries and had provided covert support for radical activities here".¹⁴ The Government also charged that the CCA had supported other "pro-communist" and "liberation movements" in Asia, and that it had financially aided Vincent Cheng.

On February 24, 1995 sixty nine members of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious group were arrested, and sixty five of them were later charged in court, on March 17, with attending meetings of an unlawful society. The Government banned the group in January 1972 on the grounds that its continued existence was prejudicial to public welfare and good order. Specifically this meant the religious group's opposition to military service and basic military training as "National Service", and their members' refusal to salute the state flag or swear oaths of allegiance to the state. It was also reported by the police that since 1972, more than 100 members had been detained and court-martialled under the Singapore Armed Forces

¹⁴The Straits Times, May 6, 1988.

regulations for refusing to perform National Service, and that their number had been rising faster in recent years. The police went on to say, "If left unchecked, the JW movement...would, in time to come, seriously undermine vital national interests".¹⁵

Other religions have also experienced Government intervention and warnings. Two examples will suffice here. The first concerns Hindu and Sikh organisations. After Indira Gandhi was assassinated on October 31, 1984 in India by Sikhs, tension arose between the Hindu and Sikh communities in Singapore. Against a background of reported cases of assaults and acts of vandalism on Sikhs and their properties, as well as some threatening phone calls to Sikh individuals and institutions, some Hindu temples and organisations made plans to hold condolence gatherings for the late Indian Prime Minister. The authorities felt that these gatherings would have exacerbated tension between the Hindus and Sikhs in Singapore, and so the police called up what were termed the Hindu "activists" to warn them not to proceed with the gatherings - and even to remind them that what happened in India did not concern Singaporeans. On their part, Sikh temples in Singapore since 1984 had been commemorating the anniversary of the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by Indian troops by holding prayer vigils for the Sikh martyrs. In January 1989 a few of these temples held requiems for the two Sikhs executed by the

¹⁵The Sunday Times, February 26, 1995.

Indian government for the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Officials of the Sikh temple at Niven Road announced in the obituaries section of The Sunday Times that prayers for the two would be held at the temple. Photographs of the executed pair and newscuttings were displayed in the temple. The police then stepped in by calling up Sikh leaders and temple officials to warn them not to hold further requiems, nor to "import foreign politics" into Singapore, or involve their religious organisations in politics. It would appear, however, that that warning fell on some deaf ears, because two months later another Sikh temple held a 48-hour vigil for the Sikh "martyrs".

The second example involves the Muslims and Islam. It was claimed by the Singapore Government that in mid-1978 a group of "extremists" called "Ikhwan" or "Muslim Brotherhood" was formed with the long-term aim of establishing an Islamic state in Singapore, by armed means if necessary. The group was said to comprise 21 members, mostly recruited from religious classes led by a Malaysian religious teacher then residing in Singapore. According to the Government, Ikhwan had planned to recruit pre-university students and undergraduates by setting up religious discussion groups in their respective schools and universities. These students were to be trained as writers and religious teachers in order to disseminate (in the words of the Government) "revolutionary ideas and sow disaffection among the Muslims". Led by the Ikhwan, the

Muslims would then demand that the Government implement Islamic laws similar to those in Saudi Arabia or Iran. If the Government refused, then the next step in the scenario would have the Ikhwan bringing about an armed uprising. By September 1979 the Ikhwan had apparently managed to "penetrate" the Malay language societies in the Ngee Ann Technical College and the Singapore Polytechnic, and had even "taken over" a Muslim organisation, the Pertubohan Muslimin Singapura, as a "front" for their activities. It was then that the Singapore Government stepped in and arrested 5 of the Ikhwan leaders under the Internal security Act. The remaining 16 members and their parents were summoned to the Internal Security Department and given a warning. The Mufti (the chief Muslim religious leader) was also present to exhort those summoned to adhere to the correct Islamic teachings. The Malaysian religious teacher who was involved was expelled and banned from entering Singapore.

Such examples as given above in the view of the Government only serve to highlight what the PAP has identified as two trends in Singapore. Firstly, the Government feels there has been increased political activism by certain religious groups and that this is not healthy for a multi-religious society such as Singapore, since the intrusion of religious groups or leaders into the political arena could, so the Government believes, threaten the social fabric of society. Secondly, it is claimed that

in recent years there has been an increase in religious fervour and assertiveness among the religious groups. An example given of this has been what has been termed "agressive and insensitive proselytization" carried out by some Christians towards Hindus and Muslims. The Government feels that this "religious fervour and assertiveness" has heightened tension between the various religious groups and if left unchecked, could lead to sectarian strife. These then are the kind of problems which the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Bill is intended to prevent; legislation is introduced to maintain harmony between different religious groups, and to also keep religion and politics rigorously and firmly separated.

With all the above examples and measures taken by the Government in mind, it was thus no surprise at the Select Committee Hearing that the Graduates' Christian Fellowship voiced the concern that people might be less willing to speak up on religious matters for fear that "over-sensitive" people will report them to the authorities under the law on maintaining religious harmony. The Fellowship itself organised seminars touching on religion and politics or on other faiths, and the new law might make participants afraid to speak up on these matters. "The Bill would curb and hamper some of the free discussions going on in our seminars", stated the Fellowship's president, Associate Professor Ernest Chew, Head of the History Department of the National University of Singapore.

Tired cynics might well ask whether such views, even if expressed by respected academics or other "top guns" in other professions, will actually cut any ice with the Government if it has already decided, debate or discussion notwithstanding, to do what from the very beginning it had already decided to do. "A climate of fear" might just be the right thing to have if it will discourage any unnecessary or inconvenient "free discussions" - especially positive exchanges of ideas or examinations of policy - from interfering with the attainment of desired objectives or ideological ends.

Last but not least, let us look at the reaction of Bishop Ho Chee Sin of the Methodist Church in Singapore to the White Paper and Bill. It is a cautious and guarded response. After some appreciation shown to the Government for its efforts on the behalf of Singapore, Bishop Ho states that while religious belief or faith is personal, Christian leaders do have a "prophetic" responsibility to speak out against social injustice and to speak up for the less privileged. Again, "on matters of 'socio-political involvement', we need to look at the implication of the word, 'politics' ". Quoting and using John Stott's categories of "Social Service" (philanthropic activity, acts or works of mercy) and "Social Action" (political and economic activity, removing or transforming causes of human need and structures), Bishop Ho then says, "genuine Christian social concern may at times embrace both the

social service and social action", without giving concrete examples of what this might mean in the Singapore context. To the questions "Should our church become politically involved?" and whether Christians can become "politically disinterested" persons, he replies:

This is where we must caution ourselves as Christians. We do have socio-political responsibilities. However, we may bring confusion to ourselves over Christian political involvement. There is a distinction between Christian individuals and churches. All individual Christians should be politically active in the sense that, as conscientious citizens, they will vote in elections, inform themselves about contemporary issues, share in public service, etc. Further, some individuals are called by God to give their lives to political service in the Government. Granted the propriety of political thought and action by Christian individuals, however, should the church as church involve itself in politics? Certainly the church must teach both the law and the gospel of God. This is the duty of the church's pastors, teachers and other leaders. In affirming the biblical faith or righteousness, the church is required to take a public stand on some issues, as it is called to obey God's Word and trust Him with the consequences. However, as a Methodist Church we must not find ourselves embroiled in active political involvement.¹⁶

Looking at the life of John Wesley, or of the activities of the early Methodist Church, one wonders what Methodist Church Bishop Ho is talking about. He appears unaware that if the church does "take a public stand" on any issue to the extent that one must trust God's grace and mercy with regard to the consequences, then the Church is already "embroiled in active political involvement", more so if "prophetic" and "genuine Christian social concern" is

¹⁶"Bishop Ho's Concerns" in Impact, April-May 1990, p.23.

practised - which includes action to "transform the structures of society" and not just to alleviate the symptoms. One often gets the feeling, when reading statements like the one quoted above, that form apparently is all that matters, not substance; the words say everything and nothing. One also suspects that most other churches in Singapore would give similar answers or statements to that of the Methodist Church, in the same situation and to the same questions. The Catholic Church might just possibly be the exception, if only because it has got in trouble before by practising what it preaches. If the statements or responses are similar, it may be because the Church has not seriously considered such questions before, or have never felt the need or necessity to do so, or to ask what role it has or can play or can extend further in the political processes of the country - nation-building or others. It is as if speaking about "speaking out" and "speaking up" fulfils one's socio-political duties.

From observing what the Religious Harmony Bill contains as provisions, we obviously get a good idea of what the Governmental view concerning religion and politics is. Since we have noted the individual views of some of the Christian leaders, it would be fair to also have the same from some Government leaders.

We can do no better than to start with the views of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, who when Prime Minister, gave a speech

entitled "Politics and religion should best be kept separate" to the Singapore Buddhist Federation. He said:

Religion is the strongest part of the culture of a people. It enjoins its followers to moral values and practices. A religion looks after the spiritual, moral and social well-being of its followers. But religious organisations should leave the economic-political needs of people to non-religious groups, like political parties. This is because if any religious group tries to define the socio-economic agenda of Singapore and mobilises the grass-roots by "social action programmes", other religious groups will do likewise. Once people are mobilised on socio-economic issues on the basis of religious loyalties, the consequences will be bad for all.¹⁷

One notes that the then Prime Minister assumes the right to define the nature and content of a religious faith; that religion should be a personal, private, "spiritual" affair; that religious groups have nothing to do with socio-economic-political issues (even though they affect all groups and people in society); and the awareness that there are inadequacies in the socio-economic agenda that can be stoked up as issues by concerned "social action" groups. The use of the word "define" is interesting: it surely implies that the Government believes it only has the right to define what reality is for all the social agendas of Singapore. Any counter-definition of what (for example) the socio-economic agenda should or could be becomes a threat since it could expose failings in the officially sanctioned picture or model of what Singapore society is. Caesar would

¹⁷Lee Kuan Yew, "Politics and religion should best be kept separate" in Speeches, Vol.12 No.6, 1988, p.13.

prefer to keep the lion's share and dispense the remainders, the trivial to God or Allah.

Such thoughts are echoed by others, although if the leader concerned is a Christian, more attention and credence seems to be allowed to "spiritual, moral" aspects. The late Tay Eng Soon was for many years Senior Minister of State for Education, and an active Methodist in his church. Looking at a situation where Christians were a minority living in a multi-religious society - like Singapore - he said that it was unwise for the church to get involved in politics to impose its values and to make that country a "Christian" one. It would be better, Tay said, to keep all political parties separate from all religious organisations; the best guarantee for religious freedom would be that politics and the state be kept secular.

Having said that, I acknowledge that the church has views in the areas of morality, ethics and justice. The question is how the church should make these views known to the political leaders and yet not get embroiled in partisan politics. I think it should avoid public posturing or forming pressure groups. To do so is to participate in partisan politics and this invites counter-blows and is unproductive. Rather, it should convey its views quietly and calmly through private channels. The political leaders are waiting to hear people's views. And if these leaders are basically moral and just, they will listen. There are channels and they have been used.¹⁸

Elsewhere, he has said, "The authority of the state exists because it is sanctioned by God Almighty...The Christian

¹⁸Tay Eng Soon, "Religion and Politics in the Singapore Context" in Church and Society: Singapore Context, ed. Bobby E.K. Sng (Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship, 1989), p.76.

perspective of government, secular matters, laws of the land, is that these are under the sovereignty and authority of God. Indeed our very being is in existence because of our Creator and Saviour God. Therefore the obligations and responsibilities of a Christian citizen should be clearly taken with the full knowledge that his ultimate allegiance is to God".¹⁹

This surely sounds more positive, depending on how you interpret what Tay says. If government is under the sovereignty of God, then it is also under the judgement of God in the way that it fulfils His will and purpose for people and for societies. If, as a citizen, one's ultimate allegiance is to God, then it is also possible for a religious commitment in politics that works for a just and humane society, a commitment that is rooted in one's understanding of the Christian faith; that all of life belongs to God. In the Singapore context, the question may well be the kind of "avenues" that are carefully permitted for such expressions of "religious commitment" - go through "official channels" and "speak softly", and hope that they will be taken seriously. If one asks whether such a response is enough or adequate, then the other question arises: would Singapore Christians be sensitive enough or committed enough to look at society with a discerning eye with a view for coherent analysis and expression? We can

¹⁹Tay Eng Soon, "In the Master's Footsteps" in Impact, August-September 1981, pp.18,19.

start asking the question: if God is really sovereign, does the Government or any leader have the right to "define" what is or not for us? Are the permitted avenues of religious discussion only deflecting us from the real issues that need to be raised - such as a civil religion - and how the expected submission to the calls of the State for the nation may lead us into an uncritical devotion to the nation that is unhealthy and unworthy - especially of a Christian's allegiance ultimately to God?

The views of Brigadier-General (BG) Lee Hsien Loong, currently First Deputy Prime Minister, should also be noted. During the Parliamentary Debate on the Religious Harmony Bill he maintained that existing social problems in Singapore were manageable and were being tackled. There was no need for religious "social action groups" in Singapore which would raise tensions. "From this starting point, we better leave politics to the politicians. If there are rights to be championed, wrongs to be put right, policies to be changed, let us do it through the political system. If the government pursues misguided policies, or ignores pressing social problems, it is only natural men of faith will be concerned". If we ask, how should men of faith then express their religious reservations of such socio-economic-political policies or problems? - the answer is familiar. "Then it is their duty to enter politics. They should organise public meetings, seek election as MPs, hold the Government to account, and eventually campaign to oust

the Government in a general election, in order to form the government themselves and to put things right. That is how democracy is supposed to work". If that is true, then it is understandable if Singaporean religionists prefer to be "wise" by being "silent" and murmur in private instead. If the only way to express what may be legitimate social opinions as a religious person is to become a full-time politician (a surreal choice indeed), then it would be tempting to sit back instead and enjoy the Good Life that is given.

Mr. Lee is aware of the argument that the division of politics and religion was impossible for some "flocks". "And theologically speaking, they are quite correct. Many Christians believe that their faith is exclusive and comprehensive. And so do most Muslims for whom Islam is a complete way of life". It was neither possible nor desirable for a person to "separate his rational and secular mind from his religious and spiritual impulses". He stressed that it was important for "individuals of deep religious conviction" to carry out in their public lives what they considered to be right for the country. "But it is also important that religious groups do not seek to bring about political outcomes which they prefer. The individual should participate as individuals, the groups should stay out as groups. If religious groups enter the political arena, there will be trouble".²⁰

²⁰The Straits Times, February 25, 1990. p.15.

Last but not least, we can also examine what then National Development Minister S. Dhanabalan (also a Christian lay-leader) had to say about religion and politics at the same Parliamentary Debate. He began by noting that the White Paper pointed out that the division between religion and politics was a matter of convention and added: "I would go further and say that it is in fact artificial". For many people, their deepest moral values and priorities in life were shaped by their religious belief and faith. "To ask them to separate these deep convictions in their life from their political duties, responsibilities and rights as citizens is to ask them to be schizophrenics". So far, so good. Nonetheless, he then went on, the influence of religious faith or belief in political matters and on political matters must be "a personal, private matter, a motivation that must be in the quietness of a person's own conscience". Echoing the standard argument, he said that while religion might form a large part of a person's motivations in all aspects of his life, including his views and actions in political matters, those convictions must be expressed through secular, political institutions, and not through his religious body or institution. Any move to use religion as a rallying call on a political issue "must turn what may be purely a political or moral issue into a religious issue and invite, and even incite followers of other religions to do the same. Surely it'll be the road to ruination in our

multi-religious society".

He ended by saying that there would always be grey areas between politics and religion and that it was not something any government could arbitrarily define (which as we have seen, does not mean the government will not try). "There is a test of what is acceptable in the population as a whole. There must be sincerity, goodwill and sensitivity on the part of government leaders as well as religious leaders and followers of religion. We need to work together".²¹

That indeed is a positive and honourable proposition. But of course "needing to work together" does not apply only to the campaign for religious harmony or to the campaign for "family values" and filial piety. The results may well be a socially cohesive, disciplined, tolerant society made up of small "happy families" (couples, extended families) and big "happy families" (different religions/religious groups). The Government would also want us to continue needing to work together to accept the constant ideology behind all these campaigns: sustained economic growth. Such growth will bring prosperity, and this coupled with the firm control exercised by the Government over all that happens in Singapore will bring about a tightly-knit, cohesive society - so the PAP believes. Harmony and social obligations and discipline ultimately serve the economic cause - that by which

²¹Ibid.

Singapore is defined - and nothing, least of all religious conscience or querying, must interfere with this process. This constant call, with the special "Asian" or Shared Values we have, to work together with the Government for the sake and destiny of the country is a call, and use of nationalism and as such, is a promotion of the Singaporean civil religion.

This would be a good place then to gather some thoughts and reflect on some of the issues raised above.

C. Church, State and Society.

The Catholic Church in Korea, as a single distinct Church belonging to the universal world church, must be true to its prophetic mission in the face of the political and social problems which have appeared in Korea. In particular, since the 1960's and on up to today the Church has made ceaseless efforts in order that a true and just society, a free society based on democracy be established and that human rights be respected. All of these efforts have been accompanied by oppression and suffering but she has overcome all difficulties.²²

The Church in the Philippines takes as her own mission the identification of Christ with the dispossessed, the hungry, the lonely, the oppressed. The Church, the "expert in humanity" realizes that the characteristics of poverty are not only individual but collective, not merely material but spiritual and that its roots are not only situational but structural as well. When the Church boldly acts to alleviate poverty and insure human dignity, she draws her inspiration and strength from her inner being as depository and herald of man's liberation from all forms of

²²Han Yong Hee, "Korean Society and Catholic Ethics in Government" in Impact (Philippines), Vol.17 No.8 (August 1982), p.259.

domination, discrimination and injustice.²³

Two different statements by two churches on their mission in their respective societies - South Korea and the Philippines, both Asian countries, but very different from Singapore, and not just in the way their churches function in society. In both these countries, the Church has been in confrontation with the government, and so we meet again this issue which continually vexes yet challenges all rulers and all Christian citizens: Church and State. After all that has been said so far, what is the proper role of religion in the political realm? Can Church be really separated from the State?

The basic question that has to be asked, however, is: What is the nature of the State? "Is it a political creation that transcends the moral order and is therefore impervious to pastoral admonition? Is its authority as supreme and final that it brooks no challenge or limitation from the People?"²⁴ Or can the Church instead assert that the rights of the person, the family, church and all associations freely organised for economic, cultural, social and religious ends constitute an order of rights that is prior to the State?

For the State exists to serve the human person in himself and in his social life and to serve as well the ends of the order of justice. Therefore, the State as servant of these objectives has only

²³Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, "Church-State Relations" in Impact (Philippines), Vol.17 No.4 (April 1982), p.131.

²⁴Ibid., p.126.

a relative value. The State is not an ultimate end with supreme rights over the individual. Since the State exists to serve the common welfare in the arena of justice, peace, security and liberty it comes under the moral order.²⁵

That means that the government must subject itself for judgement based on the truths held by society and not be itself the judge of the truths in society. If so, is the Singapore Government right in deciding on what truths there are in society, and then formalising a list to serve the civil religion purpose of overcoming the divisiveness of contrasting value systems by constructing one that opts ultimately for nationalism? How is justice, peace . security and liberty served by this civil religion being constructed? Or is it going the other way?

There is no doubt, however, that State and Church each possess individuality and autonomy. The State, however, is not superhuman nor the embodiment of an ideal. It exists for the people, it pursues the common good; people do not exist for the State. The Church, for its part, stands for human salvation. It symbolizes, and acts as an instrument in the spiritual and physical aspects of humanity. To put it simply then, the State is a created "being", a created order in human community, and comes under God.

Under God's absolute authority, therefore, the state is commissioned a conditional authority to promote the welfare of the people, to keep peaceful order and to realize social justice...Christians as citizens of (the) nation must fulfil their duty and responsibility to a legitimate political order that fulfils the above

²⁵Ibid., p.127.

role. But when the established power abandons the justice of God, goes beyond its limits, and is not faithful to the duties entrusted to it by the people, Christians as witnesses of the Word of God, must have the responsibility to criticize and rectify this power.²⁶

The Church may have to pass ethical judgement on the political order then, and there should be no disinterested neutrality towards the government, or neglect its prophetic role in this respect. "Ever and again the Church has to direct the question to those in power: 'Are you harnessing your authority to serve the causes of justice and love?'"²⁷ God then makes no distinction or "separation" between Church and State in the sense that He is one God for politics and a different one for the Church. There is only one God, and He is both God of politics and of the Church; He is God of life. And if God does act through politics as well as through the church to show what He wills, then the Church itself has a political existence. The Church is part and parcel of this world, this total political world, and therefore impact and influence between the Church and the World is mutual and inevitable.

How is the mission of the Church "political"? Does it become so by becoming part of the struggle for political power, as BG. Lee Hsien Loong seems to be saying? The

²⁶Statement by Korean National Council of Churches, 1974 in Asian Voices in Christian Theology ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976), p.118.

²⁷Johannes Verkuyl, The Message of Liberation in Our Age trans. Dale Cooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, undated), p.99.

answer is no. Rather, the Church "is expected to direct critical questions to the use and forms of power in given human situations in the light of the structure and dynamics of God".²⁸ The Church has the responsibility, in other words, to discern and interpret the will of God in and through political structures of power. (Mr. Tay Eng Soon and Mr. S. Dhanabalan may well say that they are precisely seeking to do that as Christians, and as politicians, in Government). The difference is that both are members of the Government, and thus would predictably be following the civil religion agenda of unquestioningly putting the PAP first ahead of any religious considerations.²⁹ Has the Church started discerning or interpreting God's will with connection to the way the Government uses the political structures of power to boost its own ideological ends?

There are implications, then, for this "mission of the Church".

On one hand, it is the joyous task of the Church to make explicit the will and purpose of God in the powers of this world when they reflect the structure and dynamics of God, that is to say, when they reflect the love and justice of God. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the Church not to keep quiet when the powers of this world have fallen short of the structure and dynamics of God. Thus, the Church lives in

²⁸Choan Seng Song, Christian Mission in Reconstruction - An Asian Attempt (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1975), pp.45-46.

²⁹And by inference, Singapore "first" also - since the government does not think it wrong or strange in equating Singapore with the PAP, as a Member of Parliament has reiterated, and reported in The Straits Times Weekly Edition, October 1, 1994, p.23.

tension. She cannot be a partisan to any political power. She maintains creative tension with it in order that her prophetic vision is sharpened as events unfold themselves before her eyes to shape the destiny of men and women.³⁰

To be in this "tension" does not mean the Church is always against or in constant "tense" confrontation with the State. Surely God can work through a government and the Church should be able to gladly rejoice in that too!

We shall support positively a government that, following God's will, expands human rights, promotes the safety and welfare of the people, establishes social justice, and contributes to world peace. But when a regime is against the will of God, does not listen to the voice of the people, and ignores the appeals of conscience and faith in order to perpetuate the power of the regime, we feel a strong responsibility before God not only to withdraw our co-operation, but also to resist actively such a regime.³¹

Put in this way, the mission of the Church can thus be described in Jesus' words in Luke 4: 18-19 (TEV):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to
the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to
the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind;
to set free the oppressed
and announce that the time has come
when the lord will save his people.

But then we are reminded that whenever the Church does align itself with just causes, when it sides with those who have no power or no voice to be heard - whether they are called "the poor; captives; oppressed" - it, like Jesus,

³⁰Ibid., p.47.

³¹Statement by Korean National Council of Churches, op.cit., p.248.

becomes the focus of the State's watchful eyes (and often, the target of the State's repressive apparatus). We are told that history, however, gives us hope by teaching us that a threatened and persecuted Church becomes more dynamic and grows more vigorously whenever it identifies with the people - and they with it. One may have doubts as to whether this aspect of "church growth" is true in the Singapore situation - churches here may be increasing in numbers (this is not the same as "growth") because Singaporeans are looking for meaning in the midst of anomie. So the "free market" may be operating here too: "customers" are "flocking" like lost sheep to the church that can best "sell" them spiritual comfort and reassurance without disturbing their middle-class preoccupations while they are busy living lives dominated by economic concerns.

Another question arises. If there is such involvement, are Christians, Bishops, pastors, etc. then all forgetting their place and becoming politicians instead? Is the Church being dragged into the "secular" (and to many that means "evil" and "corruptive") pit of politics? A quick answer might be that any alignment with "the poor and needy" or any call made on their behalf is done so in the name of the People of God and in the moral and spiritual spheres. One could also look at what "politics" means itself, and try to understand it as being more than that "evil" or devious sector of societal life where power- or money-hungry persons battle it out for supremacy. If politics is

understood as the art or science of managing, regulating and administering society, one must still remember that "politics" is derived from the Greek word *politikos*, meaning "belonging to the citizens; the people or the state". So if politics can be generally understood as the efforts of a community or people to organize themselves for a better or fuller life, then one can see that every person, anyone who lives in society is already involved in "politics". Politics is about improving the lot of the people.

The problem then may not be so much between the State and the Church as between the State and the People. The Church is made up of People, and is present in the People. "The Church is in pastoral alliance with the People in whom she is rooted, with whom she is in solidarity and for whom she must be both shepherd and the prophet".³² Therefore if the rights of the people are violated by the State, the Church which is in the people becomes involved!

If the freedom of the people to organize, to express dissent, to be authentically represented is curtailed, then the Church stands by their side as advocate. If the State does not abide by the people's mandate to establish...a regime of justice, peace, liberty and equality - then the People's demand becomes also the Church's demand.³³

Equally then, if the State respects, builds up and nurtures

³²Sin, op.cit., p.126.

³³Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, "Church and State Commitment to Human Human Development" in Impact (Philippines) Vol.18 No.6 & 7 (June-July 1983), p.193.

the God-given rights of the People, then it will find the Church for it, and being its happy ally!

There are, of course, governments - such as totalitarian ones - that will seek to impose their own faiths and ideologies - or civil religions - on all their citizens, and churches in those situations are tolerated and "allowed" to exist only if they are just as happy not to challenge or criticize the State. Churches are therefore expected to confine themselves to "the salvation of souls" and to prepare their members for the "next" world. Can any really self-respecting and aware Church - aware that God is over it, and that the State must be required to acknowledge God-given rights - accept such limitations? Often certain Biblical passages are used to advocate submission to the governing authorities; Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-17 being the most well-known. But these passages refer to the Roman Empire of that time. "It is not possible to derive from these passages adequate guidance for Christians ethics in relation to the State as the political structure of a nation in which Christians have the rights and responsibilities of citizens", so one writer says.³⁴ Thus while Romans and 1 Peter have a positive attitude towards the political authorities as God-given instruments of order in society, one must not also forget a passage such as Revelation 13 which affirms that the Roman Empire had

³⁴John C. Bennett, "State" in A Dictionary of Christian Ethics ed. John Macquarrie (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p.331.

become idolatrous and demonic in demanding the worship of the Emperor. It had thus exceeded its authority, and Christians therefore had to resist it, even if there was suffering to be borne.

It is not an answer nor a solution to just simply assert that religion must stay out of politics. And if one were to say why this is so, it (and what has been said above) could be summarised in two points:

(1) "Silence means consent": if one in practice withdraws from the political sphere, then one is simply providing a legitimation by default. So if there is no Church or religious protest against certain unfair and unjust policies, there would then appear to be a tacit approval of them. "Not to decide is already to decide". Thus one motive for declaring that religion should stay out of politics is simply to silence such criticism.

(2) A faith and commitment to God that is aware of the whole sphere of "politics" would be opposed to the privatization of religion; to the narrowing down of religion merely to the inner life and the private sphere of a person. We do have a "personal" relationship to God; religion must be personal, but this does not mean it is private. Religion (being personal) is immediately involved in a variety of social relationships and responsibilities, and this religion is aware of the Biblical perspective of social responsibility. One cannot claim a private religion stating what he believes and does is of no concern to

others. One soon learns that social responsibility leads quickly to the political sphere.

Generally, Christianity in Singapore is self-absorbed in personal salvation. And taken to extreme levels, such religion soon becomes a harmless opiate with the purpose of relieving pressure and stress, providing a useful network of like-minded Christians to bolster up each other's faith, in the middle of anxious talk about falling share prices and the declining value of one's stockmarket portfolio - as well as providing business contacts. There is no discerning awareness of the social order here, no threat of any sort to the prevailing ideological ethos, and all are good and useful, productive citizens.

The Rev. T.C. Nga, formerly President of the Trinity Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Singapore, when second Vice-President of the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS) had some words to say concerning World, State and the Church in a NCCS seminar. The world belongs to, and is loved by, God because God created it. God has also chosen the world to be the arena of His action and concern, and the Church has to be related to this. Rev. Nga reminds the Christians in Singapore (just as the government constantly reminds its citizens) that their nation is a multi-racial, multi-religious one, and the existence of other religious communities cannot be ignored. Understanding and dialogue must thus be improved between the religions. In particular, the NCCS must call

the Church in Singapore to discover the meaning of loving the nation.

In the past, the Christian Church has chosen to remain silent on many of the issues affecting the lives of our people in our Nation. If we are to love the Nation, we cannot remain silent any longer. We must come out of our comfortable pews and begin to contribute our Christian thinking on matters that are affecting the lives of our people. We must also begin to move out of our comfortable Christian fellowships.³⁵

A prophetic call indeed, calling for hard thinking and discernment in Singaporean Christians seeking to understand God's will for themselves, and as part of society. And it remains prophetic **today** for the Singapore church, ten years after it was voiced. The more things change, the more they remain the same. "The strange silence of the church" is no longer enough, nor is the Church to be satisfied with a spiritualism consisting of personal well-being and salvation with God alone. And yet it appears to be so. Surely one issue "affecting the lives of our people" could be that of a civil religion being steadily promoted so that it will command the devotion of all who are citizens of Singapore, and nationalism is to be the new be-all and end-all for all? The National Ideology ultimately to transcend any religion, since it embodies the values of a nation and is thus above all? Can this become a new "god" in any way? Or are all those "comfortable pews" and "fellowships" just too lulling and secure to want to do anything about it?

³⁵"Singapore NCC sets itself new tasks", CCA News Vol.19 No.8 (August 15, 1984), p.6.

The previous two sections on religious harmony, and the relation between church and state were included precisely to show the level of discussion taking place between the Church, in response to the state, and some of the ways the Church could talk to itself in reminding itself on its role or responsibilities in the general area of politics for the people, and not politics as defined for it by the State.

Certain observations, relating also to our civil religion thesis, can be made concerning the Government's Religious Harmony campaign. Firstly, if the Government has indeed constructed a civil religion to be implemented or inculcated into all its citizens - no matter what religion he or she may be in, then it is to the Government's own benefit and in keeping with its ideological agenda to try and displace or deflect and make minimal and non-threatening the traditional religiosity so that the national loyalties and a transcendent meaning to the nation, typified by the civil religion, can be more in the ascendent. If this can indeed lead to a unified culture, or a "Singaporean identity", or the prevention and absence of religio-ethnic conflict, then such harmony or stability present is to enable continued economic growth.

Hence, having a big debate and legislation on Religious Harmony also serves the purpose of letting the different religions know where they stand in terms of functions, which tend to be confined to the spiritual

aspects, and thus "privatized". Religion can be dangerous in that one never knows the forms it may take, or the developments that can occur, intellectually or otherwise, in its functioning. Its very nature thus is a challenge to the kind of world view promoted by politicians who think of the bottom-line only. Hence the clampdown on the activities of each religious group - examples have already been given. The Government is thus free to continue what it has constantly been doing - pursuing economic goals, and offers at the same time, a civil religion with an aim for the nation that goes beyond the parochial objectives of the religious organisations.

The Government benefits too from keeping discussion firmly on uncontentious "harmony" issues. That way, everyone, including the churches, is lulled into believing that the issue of religion in Singapore society is limited solely to talk of politics and avoiding excessive evangelisation. Churches will be fearful, so they will spend their time and attention making sure they don't cross the line, or keeping an eye on what they discuss. In short they will be so preoccupied with staying out of trouble that they will not think further into other issues. The churches do not therefore go beyond the Church/State discussion to ask what more there is besides this. The Government itself would be very happy for the churches to remain on this basic and traditional level, so there is less attention being paid to what it is doing, in other

campaigns and activities and exhortations - such as the Family Values campaign, or the assertion that Confucian values help Singapore to prosper, or the constant call to Singaporeans to put their country first by working together to ensure Singapore's economic progress and survival - to promote the civil religion. Even the presence of the Presidential Council, comprising religionists, can be seen as both reassuring worried Christians that their religious representatives in it are respected leaders, and thus know how to work responsibly to safeguard the interests of each group. The existence of such a high-powered Council helps to focus one's attention again and again on the sort of issues it is supposed to mediate, namely that determined by the religious Harmony act. Again, keeping issues at that "conflict/Contention" level merely emphasizes how important to the security of the nation they are, and prevents one from seeing how a civil religion is also important to the security of the ruling party.

We have to ask then what role the Church has, not just in Church-State issues, which is, as shown, well explicated, but also what role the Church has in the face of a Government steadily and persistently promoting a civil religion. The civil religion is used to promote a nationalism that encourages economic growth, with all the fruits of such labour to be enjoyed. The Church may well be happy with (and humbly grateful for) the "religious freedom" granted to it by the Constitution and within the

limits of the Religious Harmony Act. This enables the churches to continue doing what they have been doing - which does not disturb the State - and also enjoy the affluence that has come through the Government's economic progress, and which the civil religion is set up to enhance. Can it be then that the Church has been enticed by such affluence and materialism, and by the Government not acting against it as long as the Church remains "spiritual", that it is willing to support the Government in all it does in "the national interest" for its economic policies? If so, then it has been seduced into giving allegiance and devotion to something that seems right and proper - standing up for the nation's interests - but which is also insidious: the civil religion making the nation an end in itself. The apparent logic and reasonableness of the Government's campaigns also hides or conceals their actual excesses: directing or asking for commitment to the ostensible campaign is also directing the devotion asked for into something more ideological and therefore less worthy - the nation itself.

The following section goes into asking what a role of the Church could be, in the face of, and experience of the affluence, materialism and consumerism that has come through successful State economic policies, and which the churches happily enjoy. Are the churches therefore also being idolatrous in worshipping such a golden calf?

D. The Role of the Church in Singapore Society.

"The unique role of the church is to preach the gospel unto salvation", so says a Christian who is also a Government minister.³⁶ He goes on, "the church has three roles: 1. to preach the gospel;

2. to minister to its own members - there are many Christians who have spiritual and personal needs; and 3. to serve the needs of society, i.e., non-Christians".³⁷

Summarise points two and three, and Dr. Tay seems to be saying that the church has to serve the spiritual and personal needs of all - Christians and non-Christians - in society; the Great Commandment is to be put concretely into action.

There is surely no argument with such a call to action. However, one still remembers that the same Government has affirmed that any such action (by the Church or any other religious organisation) should not include anything deemed "political", which appears to be anything that would question its running of the nation or its policies, and anything that would create disharmony in society. Presumably, "personal needs" then mean what used to be called "good works" or "acts of charity". In 1966 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew spoke at a conference organized by the Tamil Muslim Union, where he expressed "the hope

³⁶Tay, op.cit., p.79.

³⁷Ibid., p.80.

that leaders of the Muslim community would always interpret Islamic doctrine in a way that would be to the benefit of its followers and the general good of the community".³⁸ This meant an interpretation "that is conducive to multi-racial, multi-religious tolerance, forbearance and togetherness". It is clear that this advice presumably could apply to the interpretation of their respective doctrines by **other** religious leaders and groups, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. and it is equally clear that this advice is still valid and to be taken seriously **today**. The Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act is there to ensure it.

But is the Church's role necessarily the same as that of the individual Christian? The Government seems to say that the Church should not be "political", but individuals are welcome to press their case in one way or another as Christians, even to the extent of becoming a politician. So it may not be that Christians should not be involved in politics - just do so as individuals, and do not use the Church (or any other religious organisation) as a political party or cover.

Then again we have Christians-who-are-politicians such as S.Dhanabalan or Dr.Tay who actually appear to berate individual Christians for not being involved in society. At a United Thanksgiving Service (organised by the majority of Christian denominations) to celebrate National Day in 1987,

³⁸Straits Times, July 18, 1966 cited in Trevor Ling, "Religion", in Management of Success, p.694.

Mr.Dhanabalan noted that in 1986 at least S\$30 million was given back to Protestant Christians as an across-the-board tax rebate. "This was money that came into our hands without any extra effort, without asking. How much of that was given back to the Lord not only for church work but for charity in general? For giving to the poor and needy is giving to the Lord also". The \$30 million could have funded the whole of the Community Chest (an umbrella body collecting and distributing funds to charities) for two years, he said, adding "There will always be the poor and needy among us. I mean the really poor and needy and not those who think that they are poor because they can't afford an annual holiday. The poor and needy we will always have with us". He then told all the Christians present, "We can try and pressure a secular and non-Christian government to show charity. Or we can walk the extra mile. We can go in directly and help the poor and needy. What a tremendous opportunity there is for Christians to show that we are impelled by the love of Christ".³⁹

Similarly, Tay Eng Soon has commented, "It is a fact that Christians in Singapore are among the best educated, the most affluent and best housed. They are also a minority and largely English speaking. How do others look at us?". He went on,

Presently, most people are tolerant of the rich Christians who have the best things in Singapore.

³⁹S.Dhanabalan, "That's Not Enough!" in Impact, October-Novemebr, 1987, p.37.

But should they wake up one day and ask how it is that these Christians who are a minority have so much, a situation develops. Pray that day never comes. At the moment it is peaceful, calm, tolerant and accepting. But as people get better educated and more aware, the politics of envy would grow. And there would be people rousing this.⁴⁰

The question to him is basic: are Christians doing enough in society? Like Dhanabalan, he believes that some Christians may decide that to do more and champion the rights of the bottom 5% of the population, "they should pressurize the government to do more for them. It's a simplistic approach and leads to more counter-attacks from other quarters". And here a slight but pointed criticism: "It is passing the buck because any group that is tempted to do that is really not willing to dirty their hands and work with these people. They think that they are helping them by getting the government to do the job. It's too easy". Commenting again that Singapore churches were among the richest and most affluent in the community, he asked whether they were giving enough money to charities. If not, how were they witnessing in society with the resources that they had? While there were good examples such as centres ministering to drug addicts, homes for the aged sick and destitutes, "schools and hospitals, originally Christian developments, are now state enterprises" and "as other religious groups and the government are also doing that,

⁴⁰Tay, op.cit., p.78.

it's no big deal. So Christians should do more".⁴¹

Here you have the situation where two representatives of the Government, Christian, are admitting that there are dark corners in Singapore's success story where, using a familiar phrase, the "poor and needy" can be found. A challenge is then issued to Christians (one suspects, aimed at those who try to be "socially conscious" by talking about the "poor and needy") to be directly involved; to get one's hands dirty; to be thus "politically" involved as an individual Christian.

But the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act is now enforceable, and not just religious leaders, but "members of religious groups" - ordinary Church members - can be hauled up if they "carry out activities to promote a political cause...while...propagating or practising any religious belief". So, theoretically, a Christian speaking in, or leading a weekday Bible Study group can be considered guilty of infringing the Act if he or she criticises the economic policies of the Government and seeks to relate Biblical teaching or Christian ethics to them. So although the call to Christians to get their hands dirty being involved in society is laudable, it would appear the arena of action for any role of the church has been circumscribed and is small indeed. Almsgiving and charity work treats symptoms; structures are left unchanged and assumed to be all right. It may well be that the

⁴¹Ibid., p.79.

Government has planned this to be so. If individual Christians get fired up and become preoccupied with treating such symptoms of economic malaise in individual cases, and doing so from an elevated, more prosperous position, they will feel they are doing the Lord's work as well as being good responsible citizens by taking care of the neighbour, as directed by the Government. They can feel they are "politically involved" as individuals; they are getting their hands dirty in Christian social work, thus fulfilling a function in society that is moral and approved by the Government, and therefore well within the parameters of the activities allowed by the Religious Harmony Act. And all this activity distracts them from asking what else they can do vis-a-vis the State and its ideology, other than charitable works. The State would like the various religions to be thus distracted, so that it can pursue its own "religious" agenda in putting forward a civil religion that claims ultimate devotion to it.

The Government may speak of the need for sincerity and goodwill between all concerned, but there persists the "climate of fear".

And it is not only fear of repression that is the problem. The Government also has a reputation for a kind of intellectual intolerance and thuggery. In Singapore today, critics risk having their arguments over-simplified, being labelled as belonging to some dangerous intellectual tradition, having their motives questioned and their qualifications ridiculed publicly. One senses, for example, that Singaporeans cannot talk about the poor without being labelled a welfarist or, worse, someone playing the politics of envy. It seems to be impossible to talk about

openness without being labelled a Western-influenced liberal. And nowadays, anyone who feels passionately about any issue is eventually told that he is distracting Singaporeans from the all-important "big picture" of international economic competition.⁴²

If this is true generally, how much more so for those speaking from a "spiritual"/theological perspective. Small wonder then that all seems quiet on the religious front. And it is the politicians in Parliament who are busy apparently speaking for the "poor and needy". "MPs had an endless stream of requests for more to be done to help them...taken together, low-income Singaporeans were better represented in the House" than others, including businessmen.⁴³ If "it's no big deal" that churches have set up old folks homes and hospitals, and that they don't seem to give much to charity, and are too self-preoccupied to think about the "poor and needy", then what, if any, role do they have in the life of Singapore? Are Christians politically reliable and socially desirable from the viewpoint of the Government? Is indeed the presence of a Christian minority community beneficial and wholesome in a country like Singapore, building its own kind of nationhood? If it is indeed true that the Gospel has always exerted pressure and influence for social and political change, then what are the churches doing to be true to that

⁴²Cherian George, "Here to Stay", The Straits Times, July 11, 1993, p.7.

⁴³Han Fook Kwang, "Has enough been done to help the poor?" The Straits Times Weekly Edition, April 2, 1994, p.15.

claim, yet apparently being limited or forbidden to do so by legislature? Most of all, how will they express their loyalty and belonging to their nation, while simultaneously giving a distinctive prophetic and evangelical witness? How will they be empowered or freed to do this?

We do not know, and we are not sure. One thing that is certain though - as Tay Eng Soon has mentioned - is that Christians are among "the best educated and the most affluent". "The majority of Christians come from the higher socio-economic groups...25% of those who earn more than \$5,000 a month are Christians compared to 22.2% of those who earn between \$3,001-5,000, and 12.1% of those who earn between \$1,501-3,000. The figure drops to only 7.9% for those who earn less than \$600 a month and 7.3% for those who earn between \$601-1,000 a month. Adherence to Christianity is highest among those in the professional and administrative services, and lowest among housewives and production workers".⁴⁴

Tong also notes in his study that "mainline churches...have witnessed gradual growth over the years. For these churches, the last few years have seen an increase in the rate of growth...Churches that have witnessed phenomenal growth are the charismatic renewal movements" with their "more emotional approach to religious

⁴⁴Tong Chee Kiong, Religious Conversion and Revivalism: A Study of Christianity in Singapore (Singapore: Ministry of Community Development, 1989), p.5.

worship".⁴⁵ However, the type of theology that is present in all these churches is the pietistic, fundamentalist type with nothing much of any social theology. Link this with the general affluence of the churches, and a picture emerges which seems to place Mammon in as prominent a place as God in them. Even a solidly "evangelical" magazine ran a report on materialism and wealth, admitting that materialism "also" exists in the church, and asked (disingenuously) "Can rampant consumerism dull the spirits of Christians so that they begin to view affluence as essential to their lives?" Amidst the obvious, selfcongratulatory, and banal answers, there was one respondent with a sting: "Materialism is such a subtle thing that even if it is obviously there, one can easily write it off with an excuse that 'It's all right. The Lord allows it. It's for the establishment of the Kingdom.' Just look at the rich churches - bigger buildings, better equipments and facilities, grander celebrations and programmes. We've got to be careful. 'Things' are deceptively dangerous".⁴⁶

Money talks - powerfully. "There was, and still is in Singapore, a ruling elite and a power elite who influence the rulers. Clearly the religious worker belongs at the bottom, not at the top of the pyramid. No matter how well trained the pastor might be, the crucial decisions within

⁴⁵Ibid., pp.39-40.

⁴⁶Impact, October-November 1988, p.13.

most churches are made by a small ruling elite over whom the pastor has limited influence. These are usually the successful and monied businessmen and executives".⁴⁷ And people actually ask whether Christian spirits can be dulled? Going back to the question of the role of the Church, can **that** be "dulled" too if the Church, as with apparently everyone else in Singapore, is also captive to materialism, affluence and consumerism? Can anything be done about it? Do we want to? Does it matter? Will we lose our "steady growth" in numbers? Who really cares?

Bellah had some words to say:

Corruption...is to be found in luxury, dependence, and ignorance. Luxury is that pursuit of material things that diverts us from concern for the public good, that leads us to exclusive concern for our own good, or what we would today call consumerism. Dependence naturally follows from luxury, for it consists in accepting the dominance of whatever person or group, or, we might say today, governmental or private corporate structure, that promises it will take care of our material desires...And finally ignorance, that is, political ignorance, is the result of luxury and dependence. It is a lack of interest in public things, a concern only for the private, a willingness to be governed by those who promise to take care of us even without our knowledgeable consent.⁴⁸

Bellah was of course talking about America and the lack of Republican virtue, but we can surely see a lot of the Singapore Church, Christians (and the populace at

⁴⁷Keith Hinton, Growing Churches Singapore Style: Mission in an Urban Context (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), p. 51.

⁴⁸Bellah, "Religion and the Legitimation...", op.cit., pp. 19-20.

large) reflected in that quote, harsh as it may sound. Moving closer to home, we can check ourselves against a detailed list, from a Sri Lankan theologian, of the "forces" around and within ourselves which go against the need (or consciousness of the need) for conversion in us. It is a list deserving to be quoted in full:

- self-complacency
- love of material security
- disinclination to let one's daily routine be upset
- insensitivity to the many injustices around one
- superficiality (seeing social issues in relation to values emphasized by the mass media, distorted educational objectives, etc.)
- work and family demands absorbing all of one's time and energies
- complacency with palliatives and minor changes that do not touch the substance of problems
- crusades for issues of little relevance (overconcern with sexual morality)
- ignorance of the real issues and unwillingness to learn
- unawareness of being confined to the limits of one's own social, cultural, racial, and religious groupings, and thereby overlooking their wider implications
- overconcern with structures; infighting within groups
- fatalism ("I can't do anything about it")
- uncritical acceptance of educational systems, the mass media, the promises of those in charge
- fear of being misunderstood by the majority
- fear of punishment for nonconformity
- failure to acknowledge and heed prophetic voices
- unwillingness to exert oneself
- overconcern with money, security
- belief that the poor are lazy, selfish, unwilling to help themselves
- political neutrality (which normally favors the status quo)
- belief that all change must be violent, and is therefore to be avoided
- providing for one's posterity for a century ahead, but not providing for those who suffer due to today's social structures.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Tissa Balasuriya, Planetary Theology (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1984), pp. 261-262.

An exhaustive list indeed - has anything really been left out! Yet honest reflection will show that the "forces" listed above are precisely the "forces" that move us towards what we term the Good Life as happy, complacent, comfortable Christians. But surely we are not our real, authentic, genuine selves - such as God created us to be and become - if we really do define the Good Life as that which is centred on acquisitiveness, personal security, competition for work and position, and distancing ourselves as much as possible from the issues and ideologies of the world? This time, how much do we see ourselves in the list above?

There is a Cult of materialism and prosperity, not just in the Church but in society also. If it has roots in churches, what advice and guidance can they offer society at all that would be practical or even accepted? Are they aware of such manifestations amongst them, in their "fellowships"?

However, prosperity and material well-being, while appreciated by most Singaporeans, have also given rise to a host of newer problems, not the least of which is the growing cult of materialism, and with it, the related phenomena of cupidity, philistinism, political apathy, alienation and, for many people, a sense of spiritual deprivation. For most Singaporeans, this cult of materialism takes the form of an obsessive preoccupation with the pursuit and acquisition of pecuniary and material gains and the honorific display of wealth...Increasingly acquisitiveness has become the very soul of society, penetrating almost every aspect of social life and thought. Everything has a price attached to it, so much so that Singaporeans...appeared to be fast developing a system of values according to which the worth or

significance of any person, object or activity was calculated exclusively in terms of his or its potential or actual pecuniary value. It was the market value (an expression which was used with increasing frequency) of any person, his services or his goods in terms of dollars and cents which mattered most; and anything which was not reducible to such quantitative terms (for example love, courage, honour, sacrifice, integrity, selflessness, each with its irreducible qualitative wholeness) was largely ignored or at best regarded with mild contempt.⁵⁰

So it would appear that the churches have nothing to say - not of love or goodwill to each other, no updating of the parable of "the rich fool" to fit Singapore society, no awareness that such affluence tempts them to worship further at the altar of a nation that promises further such blessings if one were to worship the civil religion that enables them. If indeed a "materialistic philosophy of life" seems the norm, then the sort of spiritual and moral values religious organisations are supposed to embody and represent would receive low ratings on the ladder of societal values. For churches to therefore stress the expected (if valid) message that material gains are not lasting but ephemeral, or that such a quest merely brings about not just acquisitiveness but also competition and contention, or that one should be seeking a balanced approach to life, would most likely only bring reactions and questions as to whether the Church is living in the twentieth century, or is relevant at all. It is difficult for religious bodies like the Church to try to provide

⁵⁰Ho, "Value Premises Underlying..." op.cit., p.678.

Singaporeans with a national sense of ethical purpose when it too appears to reflect uncritically the spirit of the time in society.

And if Leslie Fong, the Editor of The Straits Times, (and therefore hardly a radical) can bring up this aspect of the "ugly Singaporean", then that is indicative of the anxiety in semi-official circles of competitiveness and acquisitiveness advancing "a bridge too far". "In this regard, I have often wondered why, despite our vigilance against negative values and influences that upset our way of life, or our social order, we have not paid much attention to what the culture of the bottom-line can do to us as a people".⁵¹ The answer surely is that too much attention or scrutiny cannot be afforded to this issue. The Government dangles the "carrot" of prosperity ("the bottom-line") before its citizens to keep them happy, as well as carrying the big "stick" of strict control (and repression) to keep things in check - this, to the Government is what makes for a harmonious, cohesive Singaporean society. Also, the Government's "vigilance against negative values", as we have seen, has taken the form of "positive, Asian" Shared Values which in the end promotes the kind of mind-set appropriate for economic growth, with the results of consumerism and acquisitiveness as the fruits of such "growth". Small wonder then, if this kind of approach is

⁵¹Leslie Fong, "Of self-centred S'poreans and culture of the bottom-line", The Straits Times Weekly Edition, April 9, 1994, p.15.

touted as the most desirable of all human pursuits in modern Singapore, that a breed of people may well be produced whose most notable features are brashness, "philistinism", and easy contempt for anything that does not easily make money. Of what use then are things of an intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, literary or moral nature to people who pride themselves on hard-headed pecuniary practicality?

When all around them, the talk is of cost recovery, value for money, and of measuring people according to their net worth, the first question they will ask when approached to do something is likely to be: what's in it for me? And this is likely to be the attitude they will adopt, consciously or not, in other spheres of life. It is every man for himself - and leave sacrifices and other romantic stuff to dreamers or fools. Can anything be done about it? My gut feeling is that we have gone too far down the road. Still, we should try.⁵²

A kind of hope exists though, if one believes in surveys, in the results of some findings of a National University of Singapore study on the values and lifestyles of 2,000 Singaporeans aged between 15 and 40. When they were asked to select the top three things they wanted most in life from a list of 17, "the majority (56 percent) chose happiness. This was followed quite closely by health (51 percent). The other things which were clearly preferred by Singaporeans were success in work/study (35 percent), security (32 percent), love (31 percent), friends (23

⁵²Ibid.

percent), freedom (22 percent) and wealth (15 percent)".⁵³ In other words, the average Singaporean wants happiness and health, and money is not all that important!

It would be too easy and snide to laugh out loud and say incredulously, "which part of Singapore or what 'Singapore' do these people come from?!" The summary above may well be true; one may just be wondering about the statistics. But we will accept the truism that improvement in the standard of living and enjoying the fruits of economic prosperity does not necessarily make people happier or indeed more contented with their lot. And so Leslie Fong's question comes back as a challenge to the churches: "Can anything be done about it?" Christianity, in the name of Jesus, promotes "life in all its fullness"; can the churches promote anything more spiritually and morally whole than **just** a full materially comfortable life?

The University survey also reveals that 58% of Christians wanted to get ahead financially, although only 23% of them believed that money could solve most problems.⁵⁴ If a perhaps facile observation may be allowed here, it seems that a high percentage of Christians may just find themselves necessarily caught in the "rat-race" to earn a living, without wanting to really be part of "the cult of materialism". If so, this would be a healthy sign

⁵³Kau Ah Keng & Charles Yang, Values and Lifestyles of Singaporeans: A Marketing Perspective (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991), p.44.

⁵⁴Ibid., p.37.

in the life of "affluent, prosperous" Singaporean churches - that there are Christians struggling to serve God and not Mammon. This may indeed be a struggle, for sections of the churches, charismatic or otherwise, find it easy to promote a theology of "wealth and health" as a "selling point". If there is a problem among those who adhere to this kind of "theology" with any reminder by the mainline churches of the need for balance, restraint or even "poverty" (i.e. a simple life-style) as a Christian duty, then they are reassured that it is all right to make money; that prosperity is a Biblical doctrine, proved by blessings given by God to the faithful like Job or Abraham. The real appeal of this kind of thought or worship to its elite followers may just be no need for any guilt concerning the link between religious belief and worship with money and prosperity. In the first place, no Singapore church would be so naive as to actually push or promote any "poverty" - not in materialistic Singapore, and not among its middle-class congregations. What would be more socially relevant is the need for Christians to be more discerning and responsible for their wealth - both in getting it, hoarding it, and spending it. The Christian term here is **stewardship**, and what is also involved here is **ethics**.

Secondly, to link prosperity with God's blessing easily leads to the conclusion that the poor (including poor Christians) are thus not favoured and blessed by God. God therefore (figuratively) looks down on the lower

classes, and the lower classes do not really deserve God. Hence the middle-class churches have a justification for being, and remaining as they are. And a class structure is thus in operation, with the "elite" churches clear examples in a society that has its own class structure based on how much you have and earn.

If therefore Singaporean churches are increasingly being held captive to materialism and affluence, then how can they have, or want to have, any critical discernment concerning the ideological practices going on around them in society? Bringing the Shared Values/National Ideology and Civil Religion of Singapore squarely into focus now, why would rich Christians want to think through, consider carefully, evaluate with intellectual rigour, seek to adjust, object to or even oppose a Government-sponsored ideology and civil religion that seemingly promotes also positive moral values, instils love and devotion to the nation, and to the causes of the nation (patriotism and nationalism as honourable and natural), elaborates a Singaporean Way of Life that would transcend - if need be - one's personal religious and philosophical beliefs, **and also has the end (desired) results of producing economic prosperity?** The very same prosperity that keeps churches filled with complacent people in comfortable pews? As Prime Minister Goh has said so succinctly, "don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs". In other words, the link between churches in thrall to materialism and the Shared

Values and civil religion is that the Shared Values seeks to promote continued economic growth, the fruits of which include the affluence which many churches enjoy.

The Shared Values and the civil religion are being promoted steadily and consistently in Singapore. To a recent comment that not much appeared to have been done to realise the aims of the Shared Values, an official reply came from the Assistant Director, Public Relations for Permanent Secretary (Education), and reported in The Straits Times on February 26, 1994. She said that impression was "erroneous", and that "our Schools have been teaching the five shared values through Civics and Moral Education, Social Studies and History. In designing the syllabuses, the shared values were incorporated into topics which best lent themselves to the transmission of these values". There is no doubt that the economic history of Singapore is one of these "topics". Also, multi-media instruction packages on these subjects have been prepared for use in all schools; teachers attend training workshops and briefing sessions on the teaching of these subjects. "Parents, the community and the media need to play a supportive and complementary role vis-a-vis schools in inculcating the shared values in our younger generation so that these values will endure in our society". In short, everyone is to promote the Shared Values, and unconsciously or not, to have the civil religion inculcated in themselves too. Devotion to the nation is being institutionalized.

Whatever its advocates may claim. amassing wealth through economic development is not necessarily a recipe for affording people a happier existence...While economic development and prosperity are important for developing a sense of confidence and security, *Singapore's own brand of nationalism seems to be based very largely on the value of material acquisitions and pecuniary gains - the most ephemeral of human values.*⁵⁵ (italics mine)

Is not this kind of "human values" and "nationalism" opposed to Christian values? Is not this kind of query irrelevant to churches whose majority of members are **contained, comfortable and complacent**?

Churches are **contained** not just because the Government does it to them, as for example, through the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. Fear and uncertainty over the Government's intentions and sincerity in wanting constructive dialogue over church policies and actions makes them hesitate and reluctant to act. The churches "contain" themselves too by perhaps not really knowing what their societal agenda is, or how it should be spelled out. Apart from familiar and occasional easy talk about the need for them to care for the poor and needy, and to have social responsibility, there is the reluctance to truly test how they can get their hands dirty being involved with all the needs of those in society. What this might actually mean in the current situation is for the churches to take the Government at its word of wanting dialogue on moral and spiritual issues and therefore put forward views and bring

⁵⁵Ho, "value Premises..." op.cit., pp.683, 690.

forward issues that they, as religious bodies, are concerned about. A good example of this may well be the reported response of three Christian organisations to the proposed legislation of "living wills" - or as it was later termed, "advanced directives". The National Council of Churches, the largest umbrella Protestant organisation in Singapore representing some 100 churches and embracing at least five mainline denominations, and two Catholic bodies - Family Life Society and Catholic Medical Guild of Singapore - came out firmly against the proposed law. They said the proposal to allow adult Singaporeans to specify if they want to stop life-support when terminally ill was unnecessary and could lead to euthanasia. A month earlier, a smaller umbrella Protestant organisation, the Singapore Council of Christian Churches, had expressed similar reservations, saying that there was no necessity for such a law. The Christians (comprising about 13 per cent of the population) thus stand out on this issue which will affect the whole of the population, considering that the leaders and spokesmen of the Buddhists and Taoists (54 per cent of the population), the Muslims (15 per cent), and the Hindus (4 per cent) have said they have no opposition to the proposed legislation.⁵⁶ As Government ministers have hinted, old standbys for social involvement such as Homes for the Aged, hospitals and schools are fine and valid - but it is nothing really special. However, many churches

⁵⁶The Straits Times Weekly Edition, October 1, 1994.

seem happy and self-satisfied with this level of activity. They have paid their dues. They can live with it. They are comfortable. If one can use Martin Marty's distinction between "priestly" and "prophetic" versions of civil religion to apply to the Singapore civil religion, then the Singapore version appears to be of the "priestly" type: celebrating the greatness of the nation, its achievements and economic success, and indeed superiority (the Government likes to show lists in which Singapore is at the top of whatever it is about). In asking its people to have the values of the civil religion inculcated in them, the State is just not asking its people to celebrate the nation's achievements, but ultimately to show devotion to it, a devotion that is owed the State for what it is. Where is the "prophetic" voice in the Church, calling the nation's attention to its presumptions and ideological offences?

Churches are **comfortable** partly because they have learned to be so. If they are constantly unsure of what they can do as organisations in society - even if they really wanted to do anything - then they learn to be contented with what they have and what has been granted them. So long as they don't rock the boat, the Government leaves them alone to practise their "religious freedom". And since the churches are by and large affluent and prosperous ones, they have the resources to happily minister to their own personal and spiritual needs and to

busily oil the wheels of their own parochial machinery. All this takes time and energy, so it is no surprise that very few issues or occasions arise (unless sometimes forced by the Government) to jolt them out of their "comfort zones" and to take a look at what is going on outside the church walls.

If you are "comfortable" long enough, and have become used to enjoying the Good Life in a successful economy like Singapore, and are not required to do or think much out of your own defined ("contained") spheres, you become **complacent**. You will think "God will forever be in the heavens, and all will continue to be well forever here on earth (or at least in Singapore)". Your complacency, self-satisfaction, and smug satisfaction tells you everything is fine since most everyone seems happy with what they are receiving in church. Those who question the values or policies or inaction of the churches can be dismissed as "dangerous" or (worse) "a liberal". And because you are complacent you will not see the need to be discerning of the intellectual and ideological trends in society, and whether or not they may be in conflict with, or a threat to, the value and belief system that is Christianity. There is no need to do more than is expected of you as a Christian or as a church. You can accept readily the justification and role for your religion (valid enough though banal as it may be), as that of encouraging your members to lead decent and wholesome lives and to stay out

of trouble, thereby strengthening the fabric of society. The rest is silence.

What role is there for the Church in Singapore? What leadership is there to offer a constructive, critical, discerning, accepting and honest accomodating of events and policies (especially from the Government) that will affect all the people of Singapore - and to want to do so not because of any arrogant or triumphalistic attitude, but because the Church really believes it has the obligation to try and serve fully the needs of all in society? Or will the "three Cs" win in the end? One does not know. One is not sure. We can end here, however, with this evaluation:

In actual fact the ideologies of Church and State contradict each other on many points and at many levels. Unfortunately strong Christian social analysis is underdeveloped in Singapore, and with it a weak grasp of authentic Christian social action and of social ethics. This will be one of the major issues facing Singapore Christians in the future.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Clammer, The Sociology of Singapore Religion, op.cit., p.25.

CONCLUSION

...an ideology is the reduction of a philosophy by a kind of committee of the generation into a uniform credo; the inconsistencies, hesitations, and doubts banished, it becomes the generational, and then, perchance, the governmental dogma. When ideas are used as weapons, they are finally evaluated for their fire-power in psychological warfare, not for their truth.¹

The quote above is a succinct summary of much of this thesis; of the way the Government of Singapore has sought to impose on its citizens through a National Ideology carefully selected values justified by their apparent ability to save the nation from degenerating into the insidious ways of the West. The "psychological warfare" comes in the invoking of the "siege mentality" approach (a tried-and-tested way to get fearful and uncertain citizens back in line), which stresses that Singapore is a small country, vulnerable to all sorts of pressures and influences from the world, and if to survive it needs something in the shape of a list of Shared Values to protect it, then so be it.

We are told that the contents of this Shared Values ideology, appropriately called the National Ideology, are, in part, derived from so-called common elements of the various religious traditions in Singapore, but we have also seen that Confucianist values are largely enshrined in the

¹Feuer, op.cit., p.190.

National Ideology. If the ideology here is meant as a substitute religion, indeed a secular religion, then the Shared Values\National Ideology is a form of civil religion.

The Government thus requires this civil religion, through schools, the mass media, campaigns, etc., to instill in Singaporeans those values which are deemed essential to the maintenance of Singapore society; social cohesion is to be sought through the imposition of this ideology. No one denies easily the belief that if the people of a country have a common cultural identity, that society is indeed kept strong and united. The Singapore situation is one, however, where the Government, with its much vaunted "pragmatism", has seen fit to try and mould, manipulate, force and shape the behaviour of its citizens into pre-approved ways, justifying all its policies and decisions in terms of economic progress and prosperity.

The goal is always "economic progress"; Singapore's destiny is to be an enclave of order and prosperity. The values of the civil religion are to be inculcated to serve that all-important end.

But what of the Church in Singapore? Do Christians, in the main middle-class and affluent see themselves having a role to play in the life of the nation apart from affirming the economically (and ideologically) driven view that Singaporeans should be motivated only by money, materialism, consumerism - in other words, the fruits of

economic progress? Or are the churches in captivity themselves to materialism and affluence? If so they are thus captives of the civil religion itself.

The role of ideology also has to be examined to see how far it is used as a cloak to disguise what is really happening, how far it is an instrument of social control, helping to keep people 'in their place' and content with oppressive conditions, and how far it illumines reality and shows us what is going on.²

This thesis has been a small attempt to examine and investigate such a "role" of the civil religion being promoted in Singapore. One can suggest, however, that the churches and Christians there should be taking up, as part of their role in Singapore society, precisely this role of evaluating and discerning what the National Ideology and the civil religion does, and how it functions to fulfil all the activities named in Forrester's quote above, to enable the Government's economic ends to be met, under the motive of having desirable Asian attributes survive in the nation for the moral and spiritual good of all.

The State indeed defines "reality"; control is not just over the economic infrastructure of the country, but also over its culture, arts, and societal norms. "Politically correct" behaviour is expected, and here it means behaviour that is "correct" and right in the eyes of the ruling "political" party - the Government. Anything else is to be severely dealt with and repressed. The

²Duncan B. Forrester, Theology and Politics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.82.

churches in Singapore are expected to behave too, as we have seen in the discussion of the issues raised by the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, according to the "reality" defined and the roles circumscribed for them by the Government.

Does the Church have the insight, discernment, and courage to "illumine" such "reality" as is presented to it? Is it aware, in the first place, of such socially constructed views of reality by the Government?

There are social constructions which tend to legitimize things as they are and other social constructions which prophetically challenge what is with the moral imperatives of what should be. Theological statements are also social constructions, and they have an immediate effect on the social and political as well as the religious lives of individuals and communities.³

Church leaders have mentioned or admitted that there is a prophetic role for the Church, but challenges and theological statements to the state as to what should be have been few and far in between, and when they occur tend to be in response or as a reaction to a crisis or situation brought about by the Government itself. As has been mentioned, fear is a factor here - fear of the Government coming down harshly on churches perceived to have crossed the boundary of what is permissible discussion or reaction in the eyes of the PAP. But to truly believe - or more to the point, have faith in - the fact that Church proclamations or statements can make a difference or carry

³Alistair Kee, Domination or Liberation (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), p.90.

weight in the total lives of individuals, or governments, can surely be an aspect of inspiration itself; it can surely help the Church to start trusting itself again and to trust in the mandate from its Sovereign God to mean something in Singapore society. It can start preaching the Good News that "life in all its fullness", the truly Good Life, can mean more than rampant consumerism or materialism. And the Church, before any theological statements from it can be treated with respect, will have to start with itself; to evaluate the possible presence of false gods - "moneytheism" - within its own affluent circles. It will have to show that it itself is not captive to the civil religion or a national ideology that demands allegiance and devotion to the nation in order to bring about more economic "goodies" to enable more "moneytheism" to be worshipped. Affirmations like these for the nation are affirmations that all in society can accept, including any member of any denomination or sect. Such is the style and genius of the civil religion. Again, where is the prophetic element from the Churches, warning of the dangers in such uncritical affirmation of the State and its civil religion?

One will surely hope that this process of looking anew and of practised discernment is taking place slowly but surely in some parts of the Singapore Church, and with it the hope also that there can be a consistent and meaningful role for the Church vis-a-vis the Government and society.

The Shared Values/National Ideology, Family Values, and the Religious Harmony campaigns may have been put forward on social and moral grounds, but they are also political in ultimate goals and nature. The Church can be aware of this, and can embrace the political nature of it, remembering that "political" involves the community too. If the Church is part of the community, or has proved it is worthy or responsible enough to be taken seriously as part of the community, then it can speak **of** and **for** the community; it can then make "political" statements on behalf of, and for the benefit of the community. In other words, it can be said to be theologising "politically" and it is presenting a form of political theology.

Political theology wants to know how the Church understands its social and political role. How is it related to the society, and in particular to the structures of power? What is the class composition of the Church, and how does this affect its public role? But the central question, of course, is how the empirical manifestation of the Church relates to the Kingdom of God, and how far it fulfils its calling to witness to and prefigure that Kingdom.⁴

As the Church continues to understand, and by the power of the Spirit, accepts such social or political roles it may have with a more critical and discerning attitude, it may remind itself that the Kingdom of God is not already here and embodied in the country of Singapore, orderly and peaceful and rich and wonderful as it may seem to be. It will remember that there is a God, calling all His

⁴Forrester, op.cit., pp.153-154.

followers to work for the coming of His Kingdom, who stands over and above all earthly principalities and powers. And if the State in Singapore would advocate a civil religion with Confucianist foundations to serve nationalism and its economic effects, He stands in judgement over that too.

...the sovereignty of God is a caution against idolatries. The ancient Hebrew commandment "You shall have no other gods before me" expresses an enduring theological conviction of Christians (as well as Jews and Moslems). It certainly applies to the worship of material things - always a tendency in materialistic cultures. It also applies to the deification of social groups, including the nation. Whatever appreciative things may be said about patriotism or civil religion, nothing less than God can be turned into an ultimate objective of devotion.⁵

The Church can fight against such idolatry by insisting that the State and its civil religion stand under the higher judgement and sovereignty of God, for not to have it so would make the practice of having a civil religion dangerous indeed. The danger is that the civil religion would serve only to sanctify the status quo and the current social structures, whether or not they are good and just for society as a whole. And we have seen that the Government wants to preserve the status quo; all "campaigns" are to maintain things as they are because they function well for the ruling party - and the PAP would seek to emphasise, for the nation too. The status quo is a Government that has remained in power by delivering economic progress, and it wants to continue doing so. The

⁵J.Philip Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1988), pp.114-115.

future of the nation, so says the PAP, is linked to the Government continuing in power to "serve" the nation by doing what it is doing. And so a civil religion is set up to focus the citizen's undistracted loyalties to the nation (and the ruling Party) so that the Government can continue as it is, looking for and hoping for the devotion that should come to it if the civil religion is working well.

The State has always been aware of what can happen if one has complete and whole-hearted devotion to God, rather than devotion to one's nation or the values it is supposed to have. It may have tried to teach religious knowledge in schools, but it was diffused thus that students were taught about religion with the aim of instilling correct moral attitudes and behaviour so that good, loyal, obedient, hardworking citizens can be produced - rather than encouraging in any way a major revival in religion itself. The twin fears, expressed so well in the Religious Harmony Act, of religion possibly causing communal conflict and as a rallying point for anti-government expression and activity are always present in the halls of government. For the Government to therefore define what is "religious" and permissible, and what is "political" and a no-go area; to rule arbitrarily what is Caesar's and what is left to God is to usurp the power and sovereignty of God. This then prevents or makes it difficult for one to start questioning whether the current ruling political authority is just, moral and right in what it does, or whether its policies go

against higher religious duties and obligations. The Singapore Government has pre-empted the potential tension that could arise from the conflicting demands for the loyalty and devotion of a citizen for his religion, and his nation, by institutionalizing and formalizing a National Ideology (with religious elements) as a civil religion. This form of civil religion is thus a special type of solution not just to any religio-political problem, but also a way to encourage devotion to the nation and a nationalism which includes economic growth as an aspect of it.

The process goes on. As Government ministers have admitted, the inculcation (and imposition) of the Shared Values will take some time, presumably before they have been sufficiently internalized for the civil religion to become more obvious or overt. And again the question is posed to Singapore churches: is it important enough to you to want to think about it, and ponder what a theological response would be? Or is it too late? Has the privatisation of your religion and faith neutralised you so much that the possible idolatry of a civil religion provokes no proper theologising? If the Church is so held in captivity by affluence that it is in effect worshipping the "golden calf" rather than waiting, watching for and acting on the demands of God, ~~then~~ let it produce a theology to justify even that for Singapore churches! Bad theologising may just produce enough awkward responses and questions to start

leading to good thinking.

The notion of privatisation refers to the process whereby religion is located in the private sphere of the family and sexual morality. Religious values are seen as irrelevant to economic, political, military or wider social issues, and any claims to apply morality to these areas are seen as ill-founded by most key groups in these activities - unless the religious leaders are willing to legitimate that which the ruling groups do. In this way, privatisation may be said to operate in ways which help to legitimate the power structures in a society and to remove the critical edge of Christianity from general circulation.⁶

Speaking about "the critical edge of Christianity" brings us now to the different levels at which the church can exercise its political responsibility - remembering again the understanding of "political" as involving attempts by the community to improve itself. Wogaman suggests seven levels:

Level 1: Influencing the Ethos

Level 2: Educating the Church's Own Membership about
Particular Issues

Level 3: Church Lobbying

Level 4: Supporting Particular Candidates for Office

Level 5: Becoming a Political Party

Level 6: Civil Disobedience

Level 7: Participating in Revolution.⁷

These levels progress from the most indirect and general to the most direct and specific. This is not the

⁶Bocock, "Religion in modern Britain", op.cit., p.209.

⁷Wogaman, op.cit., pp.200-207.

place to discuss them all at length, but enough has been said about Singapore so far to make us realise that at most, the churches can only be at Levels 1 or 2.

"Level 1: Influencing the Ethos" affirms that the church is one of the influences setting the boundaries within which politics has to function. If so, then the proclamation of certain values, or what it stands for, in response to public policies and programmes will have deep political effects. This is similar to the earlier statement by Alistair Kee that theological statements can have immediate effect on the social, political and religious lives of individuals and communities. There is thus a clear responsibility for the churches to address carefully the ethos, the cultural values and the spirit of the times in their societies. What can this mean in the Singapore situation? Well, in the context of a civil religion the Church could say that ultimately God is above Caesar, that the Sovereign God is the only Lord to hear, trust and obey - and that in context could challenge the idolatry of this civil religion that incorporates nationalism and economic post-Confucianism. Is the Church aware enough to even think of saying something like this? If the Church is not aware, then it should be informed of the dangers of not being aware: that there is idolatry involved here, that the Church is being used to promote a civil religion whose precepts are in opposition to its own, that by its affluence it is being lulled into maintaining

a status quo which has economic well-being as the ultimate goal of the nation, and that ultimately this nationalism or civil religion will be the over-riding ideology of the nation, and a Christianity made harmless will have to take its place below it in the overall structure of society.

"Level 2: Educating the Church's Own Membership about Particular Issues" would help bring about such "awareness" as needed. Here the responsibility is to relate the church's more general faith to particular political issues; the implications of such beliefs and values is spelled out more concretely. A method to be used might be that of study courses, or discussions or seminars where issues can be explored in detail, analyses can be brought up for debate and contrast, and efforts to inform participants on the factual and theological aspects of public issues can help them to be more suitably informed citizens (and as such, to act more "politically"). It is obvious that if the church wants to operate on Level 2, then it has to be informed as completely as possible, especially if the issue is a controversial one.

It is equally obvious that in the Singapore situation, the churches will have to go very carefully; they will have to tip-toe very gingerly through a minefield of possible infringements against the Religious Harmony Act in what they choose to discuss. The aforementioned "climate of fear" would operate here. Will there be enough trust in the Government's sincerity and judgement in evaluating whether

theological and moral soundings on public issues need not be "political" in the negative Government-defined sense? Will the churches care enough to want to talk and discuss with the Government about politics in a positive sense? Will the Churches be aware enough to be educated about the particular issue of civil religion, and in turn educate its membership into greater awareness, for the true good of the nation?

Finally, we return to the question of whether civil religion is a violation of the religious integrity of those who do not accept it.

It certainly can be, if it takes the form of a set of tenets to which all must subscribe or a set of rituals which all must observe. But I think the essence of a defensible civil religion ... is the commitment by most if not all of the people to the proposition that people do have transcendent meaning and that society can have purposes that truly do matter. Such a common body of conviction includes the affirmation of the bonds uniting people within society.⁸

This reminds us of earlier comments made by Foo Kim Boon, similar to the need of people to have transcendent meaning, where he stressed that the Shared Values should be "manifestations of a deeply held belief in our basic humanity" as well as having "respect" and a recognition of the individual's "inherent dignity". The strength of the Values will lie in their historical, philosophical, social and moral soundness, and not in their expediency. How does this reflect on society needing purposes that really

⁸Ibid., p.197.

matter? Can economic growth or progress be said to meet that criterion of truly "mattering"? Or do we agree with Foo when he went on to say that Christians share such a concern with the future economic well-being of Singapore, but "we go further: We believe that all the world's goods would not make up for the lack of fellowship with God, our Creator and Redeemer".⁹ In other words, worship the Creator, not things created. An evaluation like this would call the defensibility of the civil religion into question - if you were a Christian.

A civil religion has been set up by the Government, however, and it represents a programmatic vision about how to achieve a social and political order that will survive into the next century. But the nature of this civil religion - the way the meaning of the nation and the core values that unite the people is defined, the way the ultimate significance of the nation is explored - will be of critical importance to those of us who are Christians working and serving in Singapore. We do need to begin considering seriously the implications of having a civil religion, and moving away from basic and stereotyped (although important) issues of Church and State into the issue of idolatry possibly being practised by the Church towards the State. We do need to ask what the role of the Church can be - prophetic or otherwise - in the face of the steady promotion and inculcation of the civil religion,

⁹Foo, op.cit., p.9.

with the Government demanding and expecting all institutions and people in Singapore to accept the civil religion being offered. What questions can we raise in return? What response will we give?

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